The versatile violinist Daniel Rowland | A look back at the life and career of Serge Koussevitzky | Sarah Chang Life Lessons

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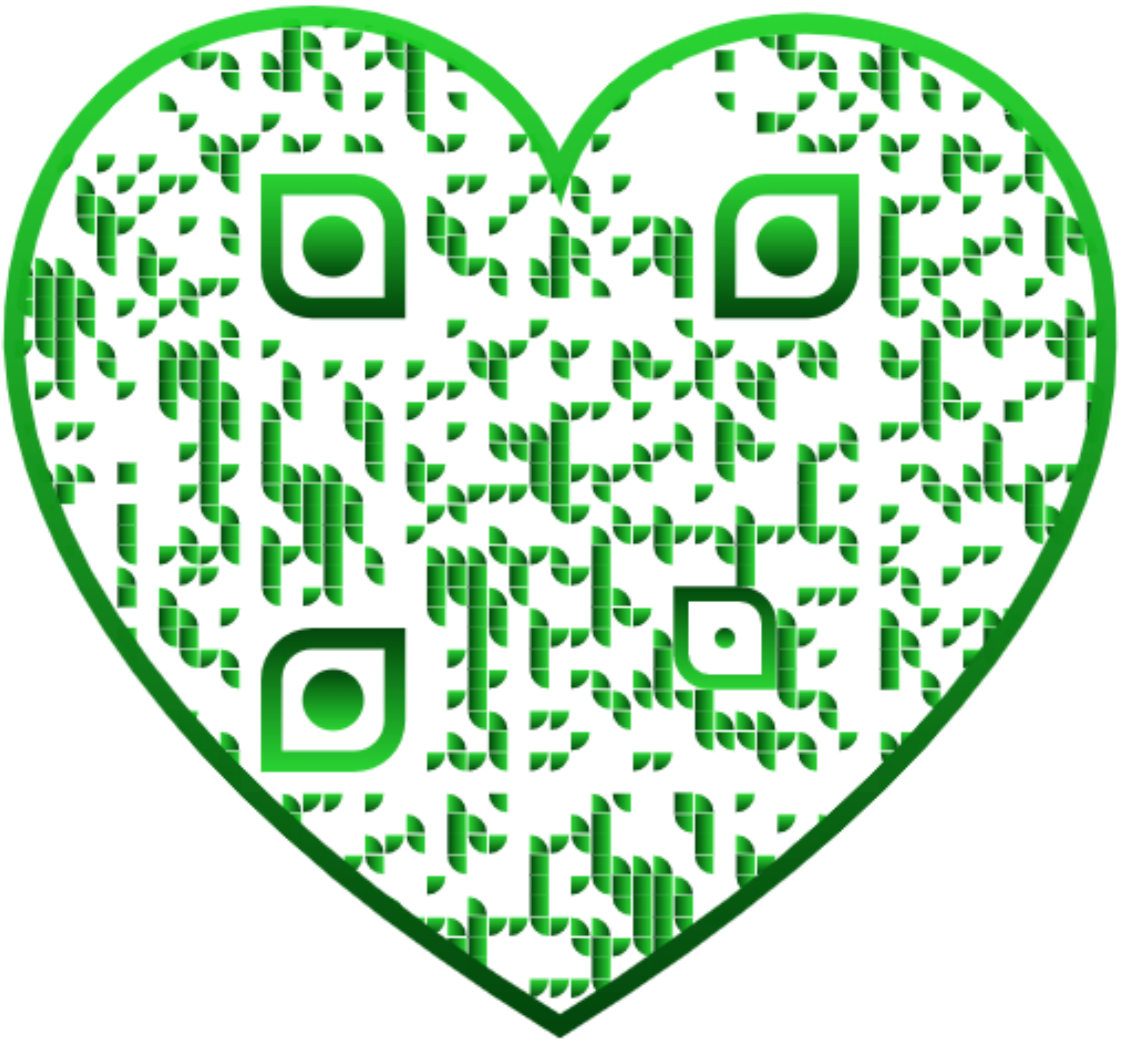

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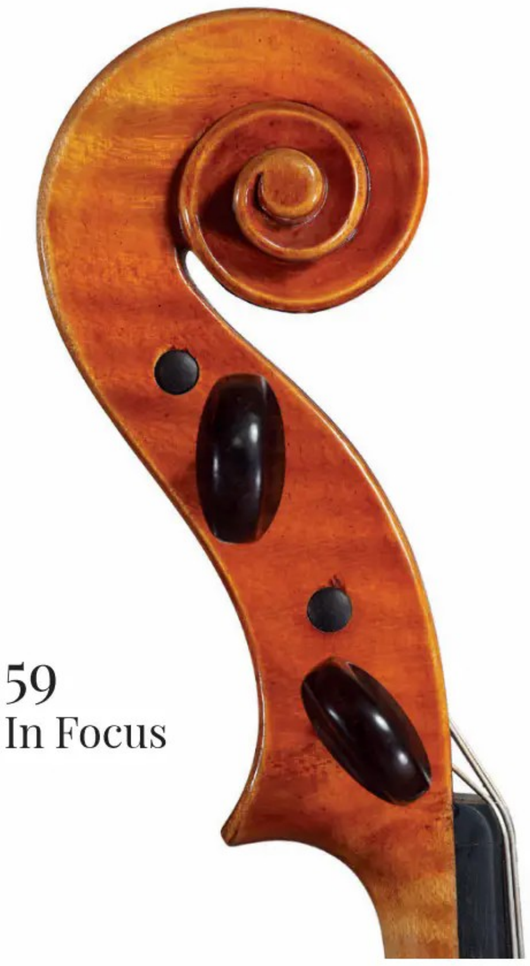

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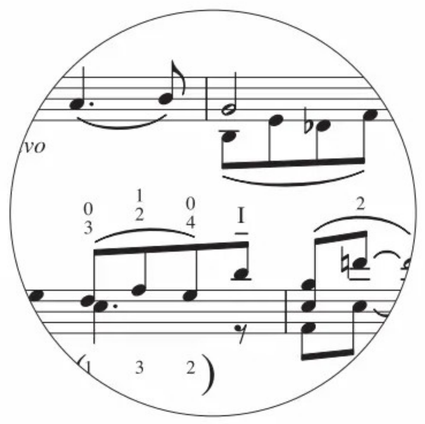

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Editor's letter

American music as we know it owes so much to just one Russian-born double bassist. This month marks 150 years since the birth of Serge Koussevitzky, and 100 years since he took up the position of chief conductor with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Not content with being 'just' a virtuoso soloist and composer, Koussevitzky taught himself conducting and eventually went on to develop Tanglewood into the powerhouse festival it is today, commission some of the cornerstones of 20th-century American repertoire and act as mentor for Copland and Bernstein among others. On page 52 fellow double bassist and conductor Leon Bosch explores the story of a man who seemed to cram several lifetimes of achievement into his 76 years.

And on page 38 Clifford Hall recounts the history of another, almost forgotten string player, British virtuoso violinist Samuel Grimson, who, following an injury to his hands sustained towards the end of World War I, found himself unable to play. Instead he turned his talents to writing a violin method book that paved the way for modern string teaching.

This month our instrumental cover star is the 1733 'Salabue, Martzy' Carlo Bergonzi – one of the Cremonese master's best-preserved violins, and one that was played by Hungarian soloist Johanna Martzy – who, incidentally, was born 100 years ago this year. On page 24 Jason Price looks at the instrument's 300-year history, while on page 30 Philip Ihle makes some observations regarding Bergonzi's construction methods.

Also this issue, on page 32 David Kettle speaks to the Dutch–British violinist Daniel Rowland. This former leader of the Brodsky Quartet now divides his time between solo playing and recording, directing his own Netherlands-based Stiftfestival and leading the relatively new Arethusa Quartet. And on page 46 Joseph Curtin reports on detailed experiments undertaken to discover how altering the height and scoop of the bass-bar can affect the sound of a violin.

Emma Baker editor
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Cover: Bergonzi photo Robert Bailey/Tarisio. Cremona photo Cristian Chiodelli

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Contributors

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(Bass-bar acoustics, page 46)

is a violin maker, researcher and 2005 MacArthur Fellow who builds violins and violas in a workshop near Ann Arbor, MI, US. He has written and lectured extensively on violin making, and co-directs the VSA–Oberlin Acoustics Workshop.

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(Technique, page 78)

is the violist of the Kreutzer Quartet and is also a specialist in early music. He studied at the Juilliard School in New York and the Royal Academy of Music in London. He gives masterclasses and lectures worldwide.

ANDREW JANSS

(Opinion, page 21)

is the founding cellist of the Escher Quartet and a resident musician at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He received a 2022 Emerson Collective Fellowship for his work producing virtual bedside concerts for hospital patients and composition courses for incarcerated individuals.

YURI POCHEKIN

(In Focus, page 59)

is a Russian-born violin maker currently based in Madrid. He has made around 300 violins, violas and cellos, and has been a jury member on violin making competitions including the Wieniawski in Poznań and the Cremona 'Triennale' in Italy.

JASON PRICE

(Carlo Bergonzi 'Salabue, Martzy' violin, page 24)

is the founder and director of Tarisio. Splitting his time between New York and London, he is responsible for authenticating the nearly 2,000 instruments and bows that Tarisio sells at auction per year.

JENELLE STEELE

(Trade Secrets, page 62)

is the head bow restorer at the David Kerr Violin Shop in Portland, OR, US. She trained at the Violin Making School of America and learnt instrument and bow restoration in the workshop of Jerry Pasewicz at Triangle Strings. She plays cello in the Beaverton Symphony Orchestra.

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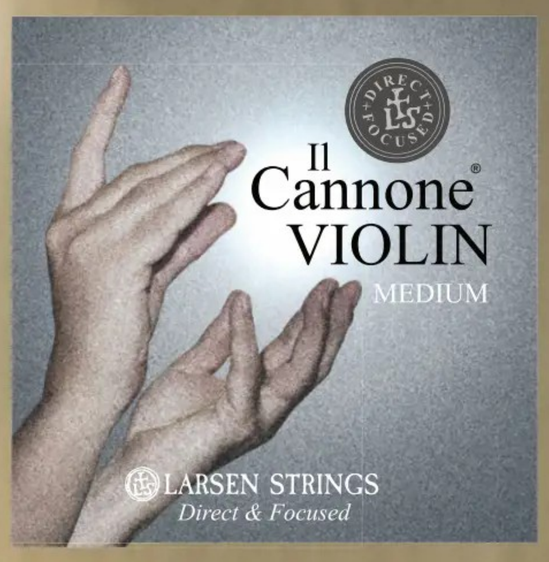

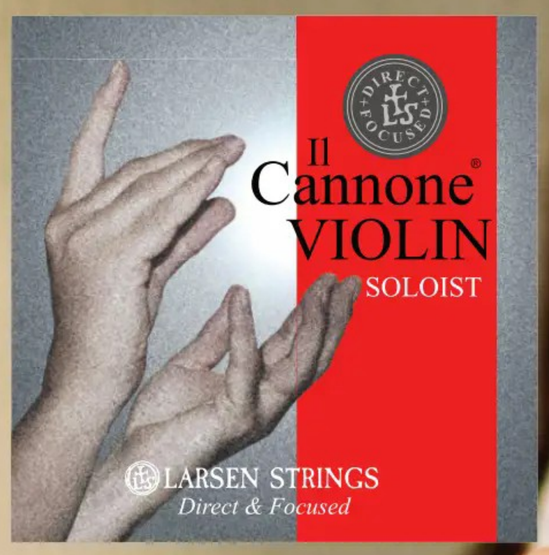

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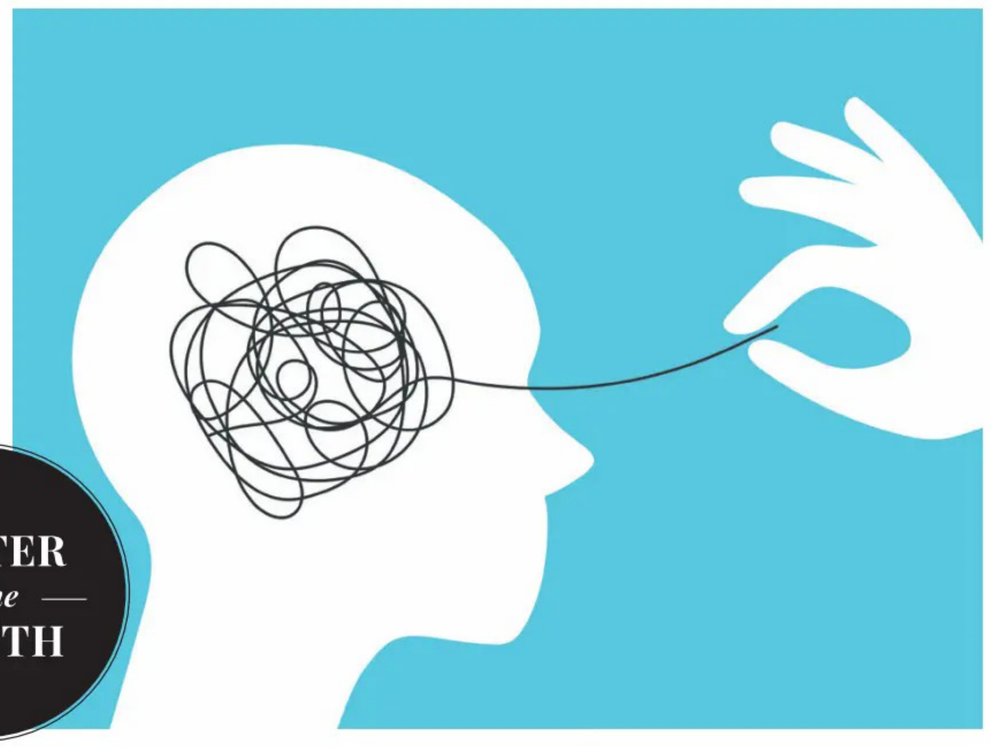
María Dueñas



LETTER *of the* MONTH

DUAL IDENTITIES

I enjoyed reading the article (bit.ly/4bNtNnX) on Tanja Roos becoming a psychologist tremendously. I could relate to it on a personal level: being forced to put aside my job during Covid (I'm principal violist of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra), I decided to use that time to enrol in university to study clinical psychology. I am just wrapping up my bachelor's degree, with a master's degree being the next step!

The academic studies, but most of all, experiencing therapy in the field through internships in various institutions, have been a wake-up call for me. Psychotherapy – approaching patients with different pathologies from a variety of social backgrounds – requires a lot of knowledge but also intuition, and a set of skills not so distant from the ones musicians have to develop. That includes having open ears, listening to the words but also to what is not being said, and an ability to connect with others on an emotional level.

Today I try to pursue both careers, which is a challenge, but it has definitely added depth to my music making and made me appreciate playing concerts that much more – we musicians are so spoilt. With all the hard work we put into it, at the end of the day, it is a thing of beauty!

BÉATRICE MUTHELET
Paris, France

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

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THE POWER OF PIZZ

Regarding Davina Shum's interesting opinion piece on pizzicato (Opinion, April 2024) and the need to practise it, this is something I have often written about. One reason the Busch Quartet was so great was that the players' pizzicato was memorable: a good example is Herman Busch's wonderful pizzicato in the Andante of Beethoven's C major 'Rasumovsky', and Adolf Busch himself clearly took trouble to execute it well. And they didn't even play Bartók! Another C major masterwork, Schubert's Quintet, is greatly enhanced when the guest cellist has really mastered the art of varying the plucked string effects. Pizzicato, whether orthodox or left-hand, is such an obvious tool in the string player's workbox that one hopes more teachers will start taking serious notice of it.

TULLY POTTER
Hildenborough, UK

LIGHTS, CAMERA, VIVALDI

It was back in 2006 that I originally read a biopic of Antonio Vivaldi was in the works, with Joseph Fiennes reported to be taking the role of the Red Priest (*right*). Now, almost 20 years later, we hear there are going to be *two* treatments of his life hitting our screens in the next couple of years. According to *Variety*, German director Volker Schlöndorff is preparing a film about his early years, to be filmed entirely in Italy, while John Ottman (of *Bohemian Rhapsody* fame) will be giving his life the LA treatment.

While I'm delighted by the news of any Vivaldi movie, I can't help worrying that there'll be a degree of artistic licence with this latter escapade: the trade paper says: 'His first assignment was that of music director of an all-female orphanage orchestra *where he developed a secret affair with a teacher*. The film will tell his story of forbidden love, deceit and the transformative power of music.' This is the first I've heard of any love affair at the Ospedale della Pietà, and it does sound like the most obvious Hollywood movie cliché there could possibly be.

ANDREIA BALDE
Baltimore, MD, US

HEAD IMAGE GETTY/YULIIA KONAKHOVSKA

MIRROR IMAGE

I enjoyed Martin Goldman's Opinion piece on the use of the left thumb in violin practice ('Rule of thumb', June 2024) especially since, being double-jointed, I always used to put too much pressure on my own left thumb. For me, practising in front of a mirror, as well as stopping to correct my thumb frequently, was essential to maintaining the proper position. A physiotherapist eventually gave me a set of isometric exercises to build up strength in the tendons, which also helped me somewhat. This came with a caution, however: if I didn't give due care and attention to my thumbs, it could eventually lead to arthritis in later life. I'm pleased to say that, touch wood, this has not yet become a problem for me.

LISA PITCHER
Norwich, UK

ONLINE COMMENT

In May violinist Daniel Kurganov released a video featuring a composition and performance generated entirely by Artificial Intelligence. It prompted music lovers to discuss the very essence of what makes music music bit.ly/3yt8RnL

ANASTASIA FRIDMAN AI never will and cannot replace real musicians and real composers. Music is not just about notes that are being played. It is also a great source of (real) emotion.

ELEANA VAN NIEKERK This is somewhat scary to me. I do want to believe that classical music will survive this form of 'industrial revolution'. What I see is that composers of the future may use these AI technologies to help with compositions or ideas, and then refine them. This piece has some interesting ideas, but definitely needs refinement, and a bit more structure could also help. Maybe we can start getting some fresh musical material in Brahmsian styles, but played by real humans.

ARUNA TALAPATRA I don't understand this. Why teach AI to play classical music? Let AI take care of my day-to-day jobs I don't enjoy doing so I can learn to play an instrument myself!

THUMB PHOTO GETTY/ GEORGE MURESAN. VIOLIN PHOTO NEIL CAMPBELL

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1 Did AI just kill classical music? A video from violinist Daniel Kurganov bit.ly/3yt8RnL

2 The Maccaferri-style violin inspired by Django Reinhardt bit.ly/4dU8GlR

3 Photo story: Celebrating Women Luthiers exhibition at Potter Violins bit.ly/3URFsuV

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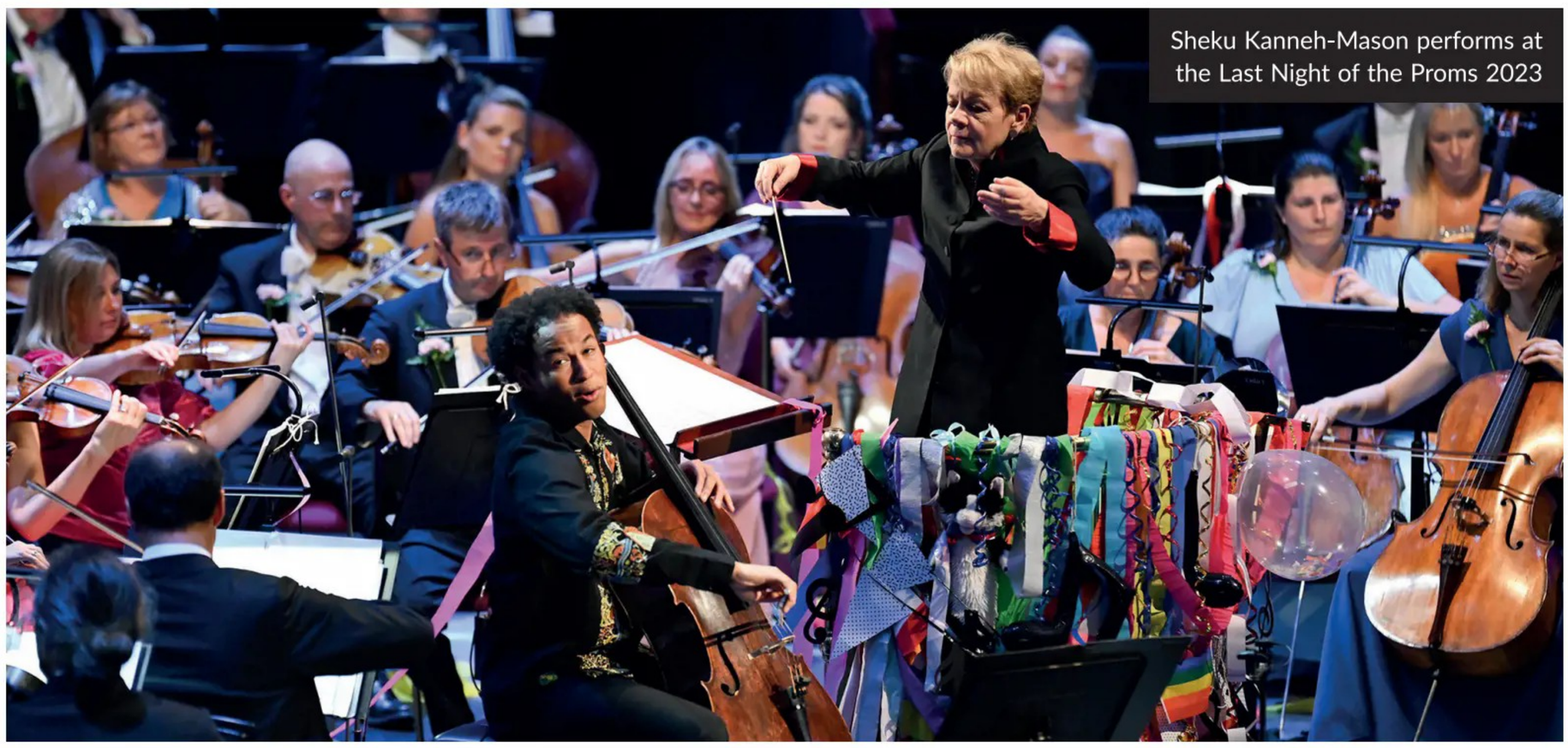
On the beat

News and events from around the world this month

Read all the breaking news in the string world online www.thestrad.com

Hot tickets

With the music festival season already under way, how can venues and festival organisers help protect customers from the scourge of online secondary ticketing sites?

By Peter Somerford

Sheku Kanneh-Mason performs at the Last Night of the Proms 2023

MARK ALLAN/BBC

This summer's BBC Proms festival, which begins on 19 July, has already enjoyed record-breaking online ticket sales, with 103,000 tickets sold on the opening day of booking. All the seats for 15 Proms at London's Royal Albert Hall (RAH) were sold out within two days. Professional ticket resellers were quick to try to exploit the demand, with hundreds of BBC Proms ticket listings going up on secondary ticketing websites such as StubHub, Viagogo and Gigsberg, and some traders listing tickets at many times their face value. A Google search for 'BBC Proms tickets' brought up resale giant Viagogo as the top, sponsored result. Two days after ticket sales opened, Viagogo was listing a Gallery standing ticket (worth £8) for the evening Doctor Who Prom on 28 August for £255 and stalls tickets (with a face value of £70) for Florence + The Machine – Symphony of Lungs on 11 September at £2,683 each.

Aside from such blatant profiteering, tickets appearing on unauthorised outlets are sometimes listed speculatively, meaning they have not actually been purchased. The BBC Proms terms and conditions make it clear that anyone buying a resold ticket risks being refused entry, and a Proms spokesperson says: 'The BBC absolutely condemns secondary selling. The RAH is the only official ticket seller for the BBC Proms concerts taking place there. Tickets bought from third-party providers may be fraudulent, and we do not want our audiences to be disappointed.' But beyond issuing clear T&Cs, what can venues and promoters do to protect ticket buyers from being ripped off or becoming victims of fraud, and at the same time make it easy for ticketholders who can no longer attend an event to resell or exchange tickets?

Though the BBC Proms will only consider offering refunds 'in exceptional circumstances', ticketholders can exchange their ticket for another BBC Proms event, providing they do so more than ten days before the Prom that they can no longer attend. The organisers point out that returns are often available through the box office and that no Prom is ever completely sold out until the day of the event, as up to 1,000 Promming tickets – for standing in the Arena or Gallery – are released on the day. The RAH's standard ticketing policy does not allow for purchased tickets to be exchanged or refunded, but ticketholders can resell their tickets through its official resale partner Twickets, a fan-to-fan site where unwanted tickets can be sold for no more than face value (plus fees).

The RAH, like the BBC Proms, warns prospective buyers not to purchase tickets from unauthorised secondary websites, and a RAH spokesperson says: 'We have no way of knowing whether listings on Viagogo are speculative, listed with the wrong seat details, or simply fraudulent. We do report anything

'We have cancelled valid tickets, leading to very disappointed customers' — *Royal Albert Hall spokesperson*

clearly fraudulent to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and get listings removed, but the sheer volume of tickets appearing on these sites, where we have no visibility of the validity of tickets, makes this a huge challenge for us. We have, in the past, cancelled tickets when they appear on third-party websites, only to discover that the tickets have been listed with incorrect details, and so we have cancelled valid tickets, leading to very disappointed customers.'

Besides going through secondary ticketing sites in search of fraudulent listings, the RAH is exploring tech-focused strategies in its fight against unauthorised reselling. 'We are speaking to an e-ticket supplier that uses dynamic barcodes,' says the spokesperson, 'which means that you can track the ticket when it's transferred, and turn off the option to transfer, when appropriate.' The venue also supports calls for stronger legislation and enforcement powers in the sector. In March this year, Labour leader Keir Starmer said that a future Labour government would cap resale prices, limit the number of tickets people can resell, make platforms more accountable for the accuracy of information about tickets they list, and give the CMA the powers it needs to take swift action against platforms and touts. The RAH spokesperson says: 'We very much welcome the proposal to restrict the resale of tickets at more than a small, set percentage over the price the original purchaser paid, which would effectively make touting much less appealing.'

In May 2023 the UK's Conservative government rejected recommendations that the CMA made in 2021 for stronger laws to protect consumers from rogue ticket traders. In Ireland, by contrast, the Sale of Tickets Act, which came into force in 2021, banned the reselling of tickets above face value. 'To protect UK consumers in this market properly, we need stronger laws,' says Adam Webb, campaign manager at FanFair Alliance, which advocates for a total ban on reselling of tickets for profit while at the same time ensuring music fans have access to viable capped, consumer-friendly resale services. 'An intervention in the market, like in Ireland, would make the whole reselling process less confusing for consumers, and would provide the clarity the ticketing platforms need to behave in an ethical, moral and legal way. Once the clarity is there in law, I think technology will at some stage take over, making the process easier and less dependent on terms and conditions because they will be built into the ticket as a digital product.' As well as pushing for legislative action, FanFair Alliance wants the live music industry to market capped, consumer-friendly ticket resale more proactively, and for platforms such as Google and YouTube to do more to help direct consumers towards legitimate ticket sources.

JULIA WESELY

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cellist Sol Gabetta wins the Swiss Grand Prix de musique bit.ly/3WY0fzV

The Swiss Music Awards has announced cellist Sol Gabetta as the recipient of its Grand Prix de musique, worth CHF100,000 (£86,000). The award recognises important musicians in Switzerland and is given annually by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture. Gabetta (*left*) said the award would give her 'more energy to carry out projects in Switzerland. Projects that can help the younger generation.' Born in Argentina, Gabetta has been a Swiss citizen since 2018.

Unique wax cylinder recordings by Camillo Sivori identified bit.ly/4dUeP1h

A group of wax phonograph cylinder recordings held by the British Library contain probably the only playing of violinist Camillo Sivori, it has been revealed. The recordings had previously been attributed to German violinist August Wilhelmj, but US researcher Andrew Krastins has found that Sivori almost certainly recorded the cylinders in Genoa, possibly days before his death in 1894. 'The only person presently known to have performed and have had access to the [unpublished] Sivori Second Violin Concerto was Sivori himself,' said Krastins.

Violinist Anne Akiko Meyers inducted into 2024 Asian Hall of Fame bit.ly/4e0u7S0

The Asian Hall of Fame has announced 23 inductees for its class of 2024 at the Celebrate Asia Festival. Among the inductees is violinist Anne Akiko Meyers. The class of 2024 will be honoured at the 20th induction ceremony on 19 October at the Biltmore Los Angeles and will stream live on Roku GAME.

Do you have a topical story concerning the string music world? Email us at **thestrad@thestrad.com**

OBITUARIES

NORMAN CAROL

Norman Carol, concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra for nearly 30 years, died on 28 April 2024 at the age of 95. He also taught for 35 years at the Curtis Institute of Music.

Born on 1 July 1928 in Philadelphia to Russian immigrants Anna and Max Carol, he began his violin studies aged six with Sascha Jacobinoff, following in the footsteps of his older sister, who also played the instrument. Aged nine he performed his first concert, and at thirteen he was invited to attend Curtis, where he studied with Efrem Zimbalist. He served as the concertmaster of the student orchestra at Tanglewood from 1946 to 1947.

After graduating from Curtis he embarked on a solo career and recorded a recital for RCA in 1954. He joined the Boston Symphony Orchestra under conductors Serge Koussevitzsky and Charles Munch.

Carol was drafted in the US Army for the Korean War. After his discharge in 1955 he became concertmaster of the New Orleans Symphony and subsequently the Minneapolis Symphony, where he premiered Polish–American conductor and composer Stanisław Skrowaczewski's Violin Concerto.

He joined the Philadelphia Orchestra as concertmaster in 1966 at the invitation of Eugene Ormandy, serving until 1994. He performed solos with the orchestra nearly every season, including works by Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruch, Nielsen, Harrison, Britten and Bernstein.

'Norman's passing is the end of an era in our history,' the orchestra said in a statement. 'We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, colleagues, and students. He will be remembered not only as a consummate musician but also as a gifted and devoted leader of the orchestra and as a mentor and friend to many.'

'He was a great concertmaster because he was a great leader of people, a great diplomat, a direct and unrelenting defender of tradition and reason,' said violinist Paul Arnold. 'I will always miss Norman's impact on my life in the orchestra, and his unique and character-filled way of defining our traditions.'

Carol returned to his alma mater Curtis to teach orchestral repertoire from 1979 to 2014. After he retired from the Philadelphia Orchestra, he taught, performed, and recorded with the Philadelphia Piano Quartet. He played on a 1743 Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin that formerly belonged to Albert Spalding.

WERNER HINK

Austrian violinist Werner Hink died on 21 May 2024. He was 81 years old.

Hink was born on 18 March 1943 in Vienna. He received his first lessons at the Vienna Conservatorium from Luise Bilek, and studied at the Vienna Academy of Music and Performing Arts with Franz Samohyl, a former concertmaster of the Vienna State Opera.

Hink first served as a member of the Vienna State Opera orchestra from 1964, before joining the Vienna Philharmonic in 1965 as a first violinist. He became concertmaster in 1974 and served until his retirement in October 2008. From 1974 he was a member of the Vienna Court Orchestra.

As a member of the Vienna Philharmonic Hink formed the Vienna String Quartet with members of the orchestra, recording for RCA and Camerata from 1973.

In 1982 he succeeded his former teacher Samohyl as professor at the Vienna Conservatorium. He was an influential teacher at the Pacific Music Festival (PMF) in Sapporo, Japan, where he taught from 1991 to 2010.

'His impact on PMF was indelible,' said a PMF statement, 'influencing generations of Academy musicians as a faculty member of PMF Vienna. His performances captivated audiences as a soloist and chamber musician in addition to his orchestra playing. We will forever be grateful for his immeasurable contributions to PMF.'

Hink's honours include the Cross of Honour for Science and Art, first class, and the Grand Decoration of Honour for Services to the Republic of Austria.

PAUL PHILLIPS

US violinist Paul Phillips died on 27 March 2024 at his home in Chicago following a long illness. The 77-year-old was a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for 40 years from 1980 until his retirement in 2020.

Phillips was born in Canton, OH, and began studying the violin at the age of four after his father showed him an old instrument retrieved from his family's closet. He attended the Cleveland Institute of Music, studying violin and chamber music with William Kroll of the Kroll Quartet, Endre Granat of the Cleveland Orchestra and Donald Weilerstein of the Cleveland Quartet.

Prior to joining the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Phillips became a member of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1968, where he regularly performed as a member of the Indianapolis Quartet. He joined the Detroit Symphony Orchestra four years later in 1972.

Phillips joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1980 at the invitation of music director Georg Solti, where he served in the first violin section until his retirement in 2020. He was a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Alumni Association and served as its president.

As a chamber musician, Phillips collaborated regularly with flautist Donald Peck and pianist Melody Lord, as well as ensembles such as the Gold Coast Chamber Players, Chicago Nine Ensemble, Ensemble à Corde, Chicago Pro Musica, the Chicago Symphony Quartet and Music of the Baroque. For many years he performed on a violin made in 1760 by the Neapolitan luthier Giuseppe Gagliano.

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CLEAN BOWING: On 24 April, Moldovan violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja could be found playing Ligeti in a bathtub in the Southbank Centre Queen Elizabeth Hall's Purcell Room. It was only a small part of the concert-theatre experience, 'Everyday Non-Sense', directed by the violinist and including works by Ligeti, Mozart and Cage. She was also joined by musicians from the Aurora Orchestra. The stage was set with a messy dining table, a bicycle and an assortment of pots and pans, among other everyday objects, used as both props and musical instruments in all manner of non-sensical ways. Photo: Pete Woodhead

PREMIERE *of the* MONTH

Sounds of Peru

Indigenous Peruvian music inspires a new Concerto Grosso

COMPOSER **Gabriela Lena Frank**
WORK ***Kachkaniraqmi* ('I Still Exist') for string quartet and string ensemble**
ARTISTS **Takács Quartet, Colorado Festival Musicians/Peter Oundjian**
DATE **21 July 2024**
PLACE **Chautauqua Auditorium, Boulder, CO, US** bit.ly/3USRl3T

Gabriela Lena Frank

Takács Quartet

'I still exist'. This is the definition of *Kachkaniraqmi*, US composer Gabriela Lena Frank's new Concerto Grosso for string quartet and string ensemble, which will be premiered by the Takács Quartet and musicians of the Colorado Music Festival. The term, which comes from the indigenous Peruvian language of Quechua, 'reinforces the idea that post-conquest, these cultures still assert themselves through descendants', says Frank. And Frank's own upbringing, having been influenced by her Peruvian–Chinese mother and Lithuanian Jewish father, can be all but defined by this word.

Each of the work's four movements are influenced by indigenous Peruvian music to different extents and in different ways. The quartet takes on several roles, from section leaders to individual soloists. The first movement, *Preludio Andino* (Andean Prelude), is 'newly composed music that could pass for folk music', says Frank. 'It's very tonal and very folkloric-sounding.' The rest of the piece is in a 'speculative style' based on the meeting of Peruvian and Western classical music (similar to Béla Bartók's methods), and stringed and indigenous instruments.

The second movement, *Soliloquoi Serrano* (Mountain Soliloquy), is 'much craggier' and includes rhythms from Peruvian music. The movement ends mysteriously before leading into a vibrant scherzo, *Vientos Ladrones* (Robber Winds). In this relentless and dance-like 6/8 movement, the quartet members are section leaders. The viola ends alone and transitions into the adagio last movement, *Velorio Infantil* (Child's Wake). It takes its name from the *velorio* – a professional funeral vocalist who sings in a style that resembles crying (staying on one note with intermittent grace notes and inflections). This is passed around the quartet and ensemble before reaching a final climax.

About the Takács Quartet players (see page 44), Frank says: 'They can do everything as a quartet. And they're also such good people who really love and respect each other. That's how we're going to move audiences – when they hear that friendship.'

FRANK PHOTO MARIAH TAUGER. TAKÁCS PHOTO AMANDA TIPTON

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COMPETITIONS

Tae-Yeon Kim

Azura Trio

Poiesis Quartet

❶ South Korean cellist **Tae-Yeon Kim**, 18, has won the first prize in the **Witold Lutosławski International Cello Competition**, receiving €20,000 and further concert engagements. Second prize of €10,000 was awarded to Polish cellist Maria Leszczyńska, 25, and the third prize of €5,000 to Polish cellist Antoni Wrona, 20.

❷ The Los Angeles-based **Azura Trio** has been awarded the grand prize at the **Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition**, receiving $15,000 as well as the gold medal and $5,000 in the senior category. The trio comprises Canadian violinist Duncan McDougall, 21, South Korean cellist Yejin Hong, 27, and Chinese pianist Yanfeng (Tony) Bai, 25. The silver medal and $4,000 were awarded to the New York-based Hesper Quartet, and the bronze medal with $3,000 to the Philadelphia-based Erinys Quartet.

❸ The Seoul-based **Arete Quartet** has won the **Lyon International Chamber Music Competition**, receiving €10,000. The quartet comprises first violinist Chaeann Jeon, 26, second violinist Eunjoong Park, 23, violist Yoonsun Jang, 28, and cellist Seonghyeon Park, 30, all from South Korea. Second prize of €6,000 went to the New York-based Hesper Quartet, and the third prize of €4,000 to the Paris-based Varen Quartet

❹ The Concert Artists Guild (CAG) has announced the winners of its **Louis and Susan Meisel Competition**, who will join the CAG roster. The string victors are Brazilian violinist **Nathan Amaral**, 28, US–Canadian cellist **Leland Ko**, 25, and the Cincinnati-based **Poiesis Quartet**, comprising first violinist Sarah Ma, 21, second violinist Max Ball, 22, violist Jasper de Boor, 23, and cellist Drew Dansby, 23, all from the US.

FORTHCOMING COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

Chicago Violin Competition online, for violinists aged 7–28. First prize $5,000 **Deadline** 31 July; competition 17 November **Web** chicagoviolincompetition.org

Dubai Classic Violin Competition in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for violinists of all ages. First prize $20,000 **Deadline** 4 August; competition 1–5 November **Web** dubai.classicviolinolympus.com

Walter W. Naumburg Foundation International Cello Competition in New York, NY, US, for cellists aged 18–31. First prize $25,000 **Deadline** 18 August; competition 15–20 October **Web** naumburg.org/2024-cello-competition

APPOINTMENTS

- Chinese violist **Cong Wu** has joined the string faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, NY, US
- French violinist **Matthieu Arama** has been appointed as the new concertmaster of Opera Australia
- South Korean violinist **Jinjoo Cho** is the new associate professor of violin at the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, beginning in September
- The UK-based Gildas Quartet has appointed violinist **Tom Aldren** and violist **Christine Anderson** as its new members

For current vacancies, see our online jobs page at **www.thestrad.com/jobs**

PHOTO MARTA ANKIERSZTEJN/NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC AND DANCE. AZURA TRIO PHOTO VICTOR LEE. POIESIS QUARTET PHOTO PETER RINGENBERG

FEATURED PRODUCT

DOUBLE BASS ROSIN

Stuck in time

A new bass rosin that lasts longer

In 2010, Cecilia Rosin released its first double bass rosin, but recalled the product within a few months. 'I wasn't confident about it and didn't want to ruin the company's reputation,' says maker Peter Bahng. After that, Bahng was approached by several bassists asking if he had a rosin in his range. In 2023 he finally embarked on research to develop a bass rosin again, which is now available.

'The goal was to make a bass rosin that I felt confident sharing with those demanding musicians,' he says, referring to the community of passionate bassists seeking their perfect formulas in a market that offers significantly fewer rosins for bass than for other stringed instruments. Given the wide spectrum of preferences, Bahng decided to make 'softer' and 'firmer' formulas. 'The softer formula is for those seeking extra grip with a fuller tone – often orchestral players,' he says. 'The firmer is often appreciated by soloists, as it has a crisp and clear tone.' Both can be used simultaneously.

One of the product's main developments is its improved longevity, owing to a special ingredient. 'When bass rosin dries out, which happens noticeably more quickly than with other rosins, it hardens because the chemical properties are altered, so you need an entirely new one,' he says. He tested the bass rosin by keeping it outside without packaging for three months during winter; within an hour of bringing it back in, it had returned to its original state. The rosin comes in a custom air-sealed silicone container (also for longevity), as well as with a rosin spreader.

'I think that with this rosin I successfully obtained the elements that Cecilia rosins are known for: outstanding sound quality and a unique bowing sensation,' he adds. 'I'm happy that these characteristics can now be experienced on the bass, and I hope people will like it!'

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INSTRUMENT CASES

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BAM has released a Graffiti version of its Hightech cases. The design comes with an embossed logo and is available for cello, viola and violin (the latter two available in either oblong or contoured designs). Each is available in four shell/lining colour combinations: green/orange, white/orange, raspberry red/silver, and navy blue/red.

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Life lessons

Sarah Chang

The US violinist reflects on the lessons learnt from her unique upbringing

Technically, my first teacher was my dad. But as any child taught by their parents will know, it can result in World War III! So when I was six, we began travelling to New York from Philadelphia twice a week for lessons with Dorothy DeLay at Juilliard. If you think of the most encouraging yet strict teacher, that was Miss DeLay. She had the perfect combination of sweetness while demanding excellence and instilling an amazing work ethic. It was only later that I appreciated how tailored her approach was to each student. I remember when I was about 13 and she could no longer travel with me owing to illness, she began telling me: 'Learn how to listen to yourself, because you're going to be on the road for the rest of your life.' At the time I thought I was too young to hear that, but it turned out to be invaluable advice.

I started touring professionally when I was eight. From remote schooling on planes to child services monitoring my rehearsals and concerts, I knew it wasn't a 'normal' life, but it was *my* normal. I am particularly grateful to my agent Lee Lamont, who was the quintessential protective manager. When I was making the transition from high school to college, she would meet with all the university presidents and deans for me to ensure my studies would work around my schedule. I am also very grateful to other musicians, such as Midori, who experienced the same crazy life of a 'child prodigy'. Her advice and friendship are things I will never take for granted.

My time at Juilliard was marked by amazing camaraderie, especially among Miss DeLay's other students. I still see so many of them today. And no matter how many concerts I've done in my life, it is always the special projects with dear friends and colleagues that remind me why I do what I do. It really isn't about the quantity of concerts but the quality.

It isn't about the quantity of concerts but the quality

I wish I had been told at a younger age how much of a business this industry is. Unfortunately it isn't only about making music. I remember being so confused as a child about why we had four different lawyers in a room talking about everything from copyright to trusts and estates! That said, there have been very positive shifts in this respect, particularly with the demand for outreach. It's beautiful to see the efforts of musicians to ensure an appreciation of classical music in the next generation.

My advice for young musicians would just be to enjoy the moment before this art becomes a 'job' (and I hate to use that word!). It goes by very quickly. Enjoy the fact that you're making music with colleagues and friends, and savour every moment you get to do that before the real world hits!

INTERVIEW BY RITA FERNANDES

Chang aged six performing Mozart's Violin Concerto no.3

TOP PHOTO COLIN BELL. INSET PHOTO DENNIS DIMMICK

THROWAWAY CULTURE

Cellist **Andrew Janss** was shocked to discover the phenomenon of the cheap, single-use bow: one that costs more to rehair than replace. He calls for a change in manufacturers' attitudes to such waste

The first time I saw a violin-bow graveyard was a jarring experience: a pile of roughly 500 bows of various sizes mangled together in a set of trash cans, waiting for a trip to the landfill site. For a professional cellist, the sight of even one broken bow is usually enough to make me taste bile in the back of my throat. This, in comparison, was so over the top that I stood there stupified, a testament to the fact that most of us performers know nothing about one of the most intractable problems in the string music education world: the takeover of the cheap, single-use bow.

The setting for this scene was the office of a respected New York violin shop, which was responsible for many of the instrument rentals in their neighbourhood. When I looked closer at this upsetting pile, I noticed a suspiciously large number of bows that seemed perfectly intact among those with noticeable breaks and cracks. The shop manager explained to me that the hair on these bows needed replacing, but it made no sense to do so, as the cost of having the master luthier perform a rehair would be many times the price of an entirely new bow.

Even if an imaginary luthier were willing to service them cost-competitively, often what makes single-use bows so cheap in the first place is the manufacturing short cut of gluing the hair in at both ends. This makes them exceptionally more difficult to rehair than a standard bow, in which the hair is press-fitted in with a bespoke wood plug, cut anew each time by the luthier.

This store was not alone. Indeed, the market for inexpensive new hardwood bows has made the single-use bow the rule rather than the exception, adding to major deforestation concerns globally. Talking with the staff in another shop in a major Texas city, I was told that they go through 'thousands' of these bows annually. Researching comprehensive data on how many single-use bows are thrown away each year in the US was beyond this cellist's capability, but back-of-the-napkin estimates can easily approach 100,000 bows per year when one extrapolates that over 1,000 are being thrown away in multiple individual urban neighbourhoods.

What makes the bows so cheap is the short cut of gluing the hair in at both ends

Bizarrely enough, it wasn't the environmental question that brought me to this store in the first place. The initial impetus for my visit was a nasty pattern that had been irking me regarding the difficulty of giving masterclasses in lower-income schools. There are few moments more frustrating than when a teacher has to explain that the primary reason a student's sound isn't improving is that their school-provided bow has only about a few dozen eyelash-thin hairs left, coated in rosin and grime. This is often followed by their teacher feeling it necessary to explain all of the barriers they face in maintaining their school's instruments.

Teachers, of course, are not to blame for this situation. Countless classrooms already double as makeshift Frankensteinian laboratories, where teachers try to extend the life of their cheap instruments beyond any reasonable expectation. I had come to this violin shop to enquire about potential innovations, only to be introduced to the other, environmental face of this two-headed, bow-quality monster.

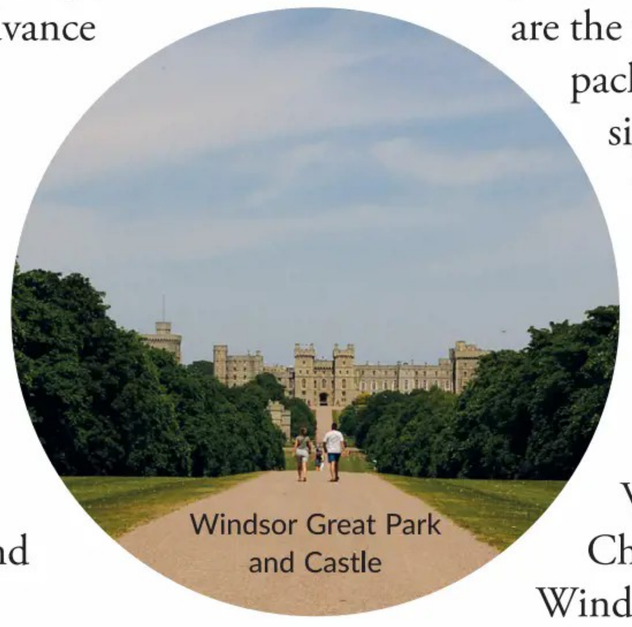
We are in desperate need of innovation to provide all aspiring young musicians with access to instruments that can be maintained easily and cheaply, so that they can experiment, learn and grow at a pace defined by their passion and dedication, not their economic situation. And in our era of computer-aided design and sustainable new materials, we must demand that these instruments are made with sustainability, and not just with the bottom line in mind.

The winner takes it all

Charlotte Gardner reports from the first in-person Windsor Festival International String Competition to take place since 2019, and discovers that the talented competitors still have everything to play for

The biennial Windsor Festival International String Competition (WFISC) may be small in size and comparatively new, but owing to both its track record in singling out artists who appear set for significant performance careers, and its career-changing first-prize package, the 2024 edition felt in advance like one of the year's most important competition diary dates, not least as this was its first live edition since 2019.

This ninth edition was, as ever, open simultaneously to violinists, violists and cellists aged 16–26. Equally, as ever, the prize was not so much about monetary value (a comparatively modest £5,000, £2,000 and £1,000 respectively to the three finalists) or any in-competition opportunity to play with an orchestra (all the rounds are piano-accompanied recitals). Instead, concerto engagements are the focus of the first-prize package, which for 2024 was significantly expanded thanks to two new associate orchestras: the Royal Philharmonic, with whom the winner now not only gets the usual concerto gig in Windsor Castle's Waterloo Chamber during the Windsor Festival in September, but also a UK tour; and the Orpheus Sinfonia, offering a London concerto performance. There is also the customary solo recital recording with Champs Hill Records, plus solo recital engagements, including one at composer William Walton's home on the island of Ischia.


Windsor Great Park and Castle

GLEEKER/GETTY

So the WFISC remains a competition where the winner takes all, though also one where no one loses out financially for having entered, and everyone gains experientially. All twelve semi-finalists had their travel arranged and paid for by the competition itself – something the cellists in particular spoke of with appreciation. Once in Windsor, they lodged with host families which provided home-from-home support for the duration (9–16 March). Those who didn't progress to the finals nevertheless met with the judges for feedback and had the chance to support local young string players through a workshop and performance of Elgar's *Serenade for Strings*. On finals night at Eton College School Hall, they had the chance to meet the Duke of Edinburgh, alongside the finalists, before being invited to attend the post-finals party and to socialise more informally with the judges. As Windsor Festival director Martin Denny told me, 'Who knows what may happen as a result of those conversations.'

The judges were violinist Joji Hattori, violist Lars Anders Tomter and cellist Hannah Roberts for the semi-finals (12 and 13 March); Natalie Clein replaced Roberts for the finals (15 March), when the core jury of three was augmented by Denny himself, RPO managing director James Williams, and Champs Hill Records executive producer Alexander Van Ingen.

One of the distinguishing elements of WFISC is its absence of set works, the only compulsory repertoire requirements for the semi-finals being two contrasting movements of a Bach sonata or partita, and any piece written in or after 1975. The final piano-accompanied recital was then an entirely free choice. And while it's unusual for a major competition

Finalists *(l–r)* violinist Leon Blekh (second prize), cellist Leland Ko (third prize) and cellist Andrew Byun (first prize)

to make concerto performance the prize rather than part of the selection process, to some extent this aided the jury in finding that true, compelling young voice. As Tomter said to me, 'Most string players can be most true to themselves by not having to project through a symphony orchestra. Concerto performance is a very unbalanced view of what string playing is about. These days, interesting musicians do a lot of chamber music and *some* concerto playing.'

Interest was certainly the operative word across the rounds. From the semi-finalists – five violinists, one violist and five cellists, chosen from 159 applicants hailing from 40 countries – came eleven entirely contrasting programmes whose musical quality often felt well beyond the competition norm. The competitors also spanned the age spectrum, from 16-year-old Chinese violinist Julia Wang (a natural musician who swiftly won the room over) to three 26-year-olds – which would have been four, had Korean violinist Anna Im not had to withdraw owing to injury.

Another sadness was 20-year-old American violinist Yesong Sophie Lee being forced to withdraw at 72 hours' notice, having been refused permission to attend by Philadelphia's Curtis Institute, where she studies. The Windsor Festival appealed, but to no avail, so taking her place at the eleventh hour was 24-year-old Dutch violinist Leon Blekh, who ended up taking second prize. A real old-style virtuoso with a tremendous Russian-school sound, he combined ear-popping technique with huge musicality in Ernst's *The Last Rose of Summer*, before displaying rich-toned power and romance in Strauss's Violin Sonata. He brought the Strauss to the final too, performing it with equal aplomb, while doubling down on the virtuoso image by way of Tchaikovsky's technically formidable *Valse-Scherzo* – a brilliantly executed, crowd-pleasing pairing that secured him the audience prize as well.

The other two finalists were cellists, and their placing felt inevitable from the moment they played their first semi-final notes. First we heard 25-year-old American-Canadian cellist Leland Ko in a notably cohesive, personality-rich, highly communicative programme. He was the only finalist to include concerto music in his semi-final programme; and the first two movements of Walton's Cello Concerto were a canny choice, translating effortlessly into the chamber domain. He also got creative with Bach's Cello Suite no.1 in G major, presenting four movements in alternation with four from Bright Sheng's *Seven Tunes Heard in China* (1995). His finals highlight was a graceful Bartók Rhapsody no.1.

But it was 25-year-old Canadian cellist Andrew Byun who would ultimately, and rightly, take first prize. Byun was the last to perform in the semi-finals, and you had to feel for him that night as he strode out at 8pm before a flagging audience who had already heard several excellent programmes. Yet any listening fatigue went out of the window when he launched into the Preludio of Penderecki's Suite for solo cello with an electrifyingly energetic, room-commanding combination of musicality, muscle, theatre (at one point his wrist appeared almost to spin the cello), technique and tone. Next, ornamentations coloured his outward-reaching Prelude from Bach's Cello Suite no.3 in C major, which included a perfectly executed double-stopped trill. Debussy's Cello Sonata revealed high levels of chamber sensitivity, as he was able and willing to merge at points with the piano's textures. Brahms's Cello Sonata no.2 delivered a world of thought and sound. He later told me, 'I thought that if I could play just one piece in England in front of an audience, this would be it. Every movement is so different, and it has such a special slow movement.'

Byun's final recital began with a bang too, as he performed Isang Yun's solo cello piece *Glissées* (1970), whose feast of drama, colour and virtuosity spotlit the cellist's own Korean heritage. He followed a lyrical Bridge Cello Sonata with a multicoloured, strongly shaped and technically poised Hindemith Sonata for solo cello. It was a striking and courageous programme, boding well for what will now be Byun's first major concerto opportunities. 'Every young artist that performs their debut with a major London orchestra really needs an element of courage to put their best foot forward,' the RPO's James Williams told me later. 'Andrew clearly has that, and with the presence and stagecraft he has, he will give a fantastic performance. He will be a star to watch out for in the future.'

GILL HEPPELL/WINDSOR FESTIVAL

RESPLENDENT HARMONY

The 1733 ‘Salabue, Martzy’ is one of the finest instruments by Carlo Bergonzi in existence. **Jason Price** examines the violin and looks at its travels over the past 300 years

In the 1730s Cremona was home to three master violin makers: Antonio Stradivari, Guarneri ‘del Gesù’ and Carlo Bergonzi. The Stradivari workshop was by then world-famous and ‘del Gesù’ was the third generation in a family of successful makers, but Bergonzi was the first in his family to take up the craft. He had no famous parentage or pedigree, and yet in around 1730 he burst on to the scene with his sensational, masterpiece violins.

Historically, Bergonzi was assumed to have been a student of Giuseppe Guarneri ‘filius Andreae’ but most experts now agree that he probably learnt the craft from Vincenzo Rugeri. While the influence of Guarneri is evident, Bergonzi’s social ties to the Rugeri family and the structural, technical elements of his construction methods suggest a relationship forged outside of the Amati–Guarneri tradition.

The back of the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ is made in one piece of beautiful, fully flamed, imported maple. We see the same wood in a number of other Bergonzi violins from this period including the ‘Earl of Falmouth’, the ‘Kreisler’, the ‘Knoop’ and the ‘Bennett, Reiffenberg, Brooks’. Interestingly, most Stradivari instruments from this period are made with either plain or domestic maple. Where did Bergonzi get his exceptionally fancy wood and, more importantly, how did he have a better selection than Stradivari?

The ‘Salabue, Martzy’ was built on the internal form known as MS1060, currently preserved in Cremona’s Museo del Violino.

Left–right The ‘Salabue, Martzy’, the ‘Earl of Falmouth’ and the ‘Bennett, Reiffenberg, Brooks’, all from c.1732–36

This form shares many similarities with the Stradivari moulds, also in the museum’s collection, including the system of ten anchor posts to affix the corner-blocks and ribs. The dimensions and proportions vary slightly between the Bergonzi and Stradivari forms, but the most significant difference is that Bergonzi’s upper corners are set higher and the shape of Bergonzi’s upper bouts is more of an inverted letter ‘D’, whereas Stradivari’s upper bouts resemble an upside-down Omega symbol (Ω). The shape of Bergonzi’s upper bouts does, in fact, more closely resemble the outline of Giuseppe Guarneri ‘filius Andreae’.

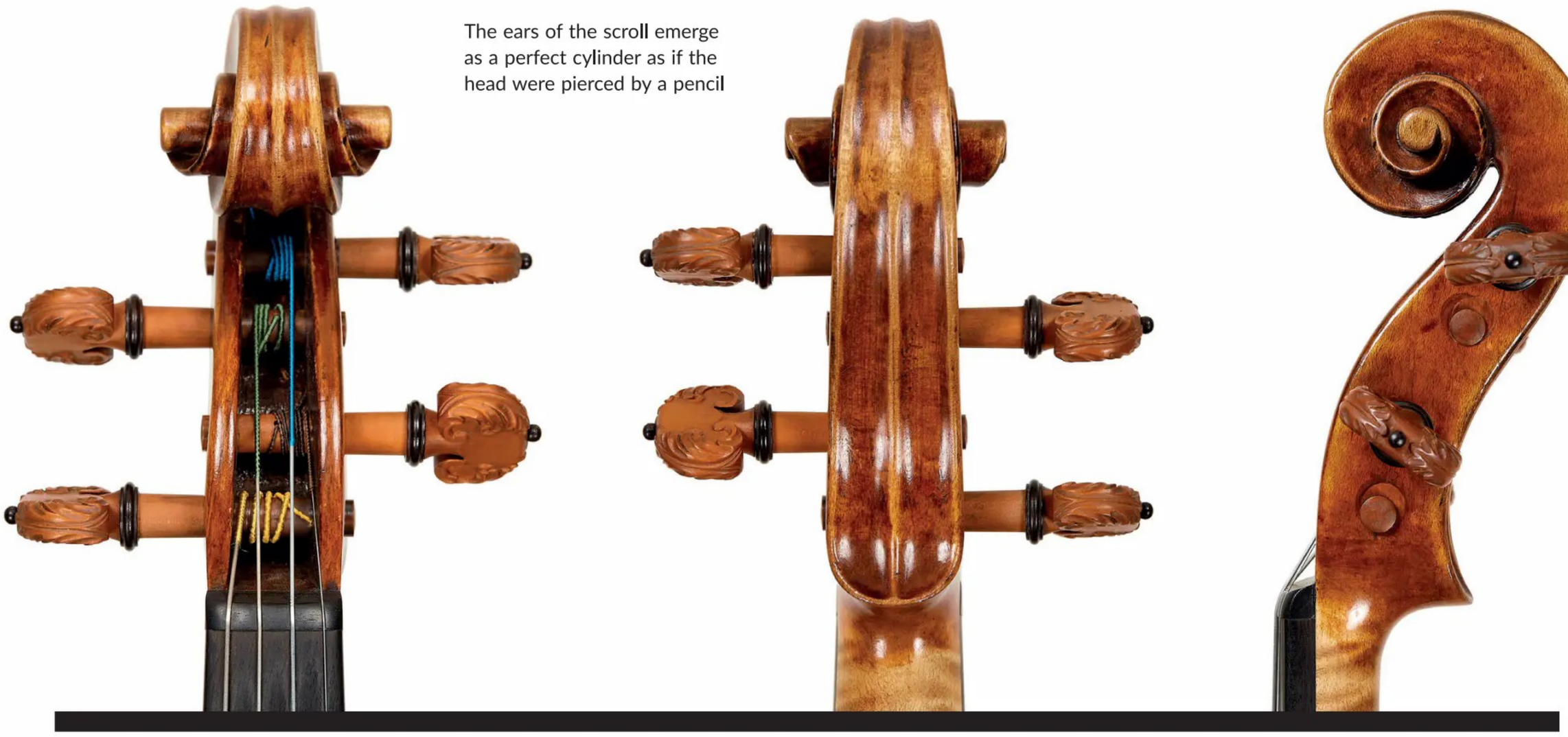
The f-holes of the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ are bold and distinctive. In concept, they derive from a Stradivari model but the stems are more angled and the wings are broader. The upper eyes are 42mm apart and the stop length is 197mm.

The ribs are high by Cremonese standards, measuring 32mm at the upper blocks and nearly 33mm at the lower. The ribs are meticulously bent and formed, leading to perfectly parallel sides and symmetrical outlines of the front and back plates. There are traces of toothed-plane blade marks in the C-bouts. The internal work is constructed in willow. The linings are tall and precisely trimmed. The upper and lower bout linings abut the blocks, and the C-bout linings are set in with a shallow angled cut. ▹

THE F-HOLES OF THE ‘SALABUE, MARTZY’ ARE BOLD AND DISTINCTIVE

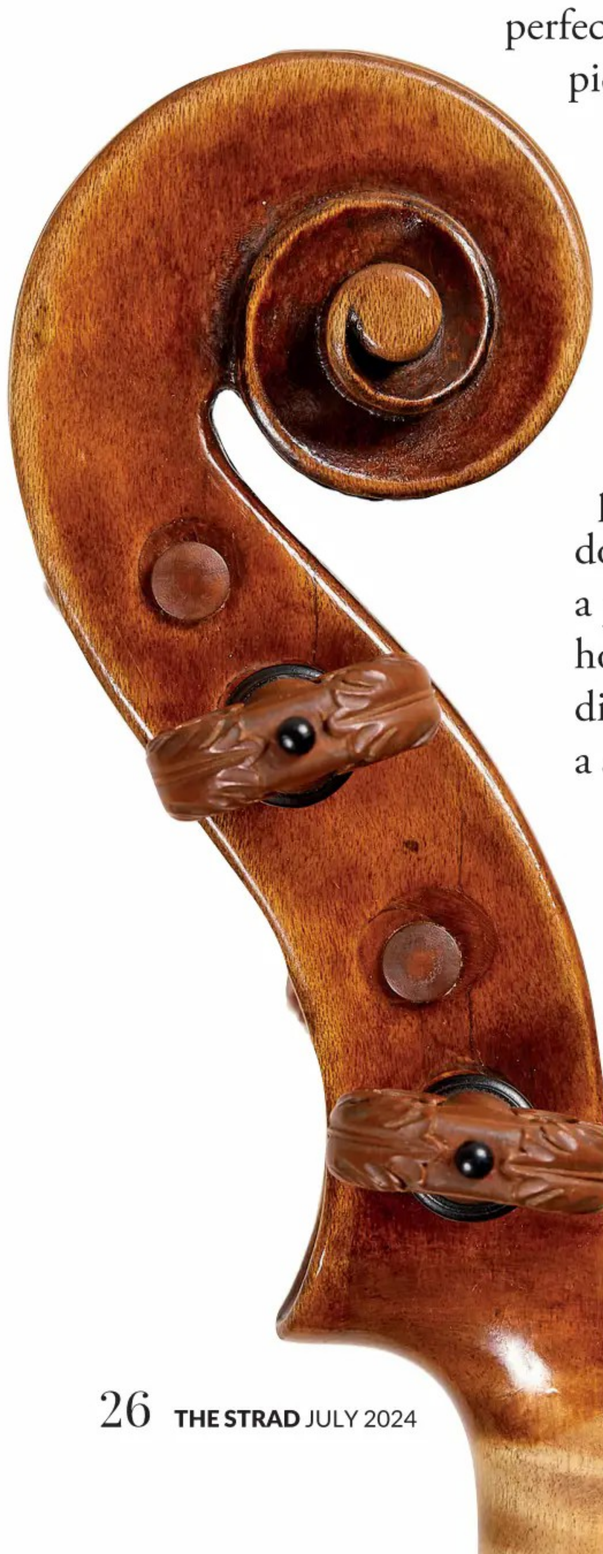
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY TARISIO

CARLO BERGONZI ‘SALABUE, MARTZY’ VIOLIN 1733



The ears of the scroll emerge as a perfect cylinder as if the head were pierced by a pencil

The head of the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ is precisely carved but is somewhat underwhelming in contrast to the boldness of the rest of the instrument. Perhaps this is due in part to the plainness of the wood that the maker selected. The influence of Vincenzo Rugeri is detectable in the model of the head, particularly in the formation of the final turns of the volute, which lack the ‘comma’ usually seen in the transition into the eye. Viewed from the front, the ears of the scroll emerge as a perfect cylinder as if the head were pierced by a pencil. The width of the scroll is 41.5mm but appears even wider owing to the narrowness of the second turn.



As with other Bergonzi violins, the locating pins visible at the upper and lower edges of the back just inside the purfling are made of square dowels, not round. This produces a proverbial ‘square peg in a round hole’, as the corners of the pin distort the circular hole into a square.

The purfling is made of poplar. The staining in the ‘black’ strips has fled somewhat, especially in the areas under the hand and shoulder which are subjected to moisture from playing. The corner mitres and the cut of the purfling channel are by no means precise but they don’t distract from a harmonious whole.

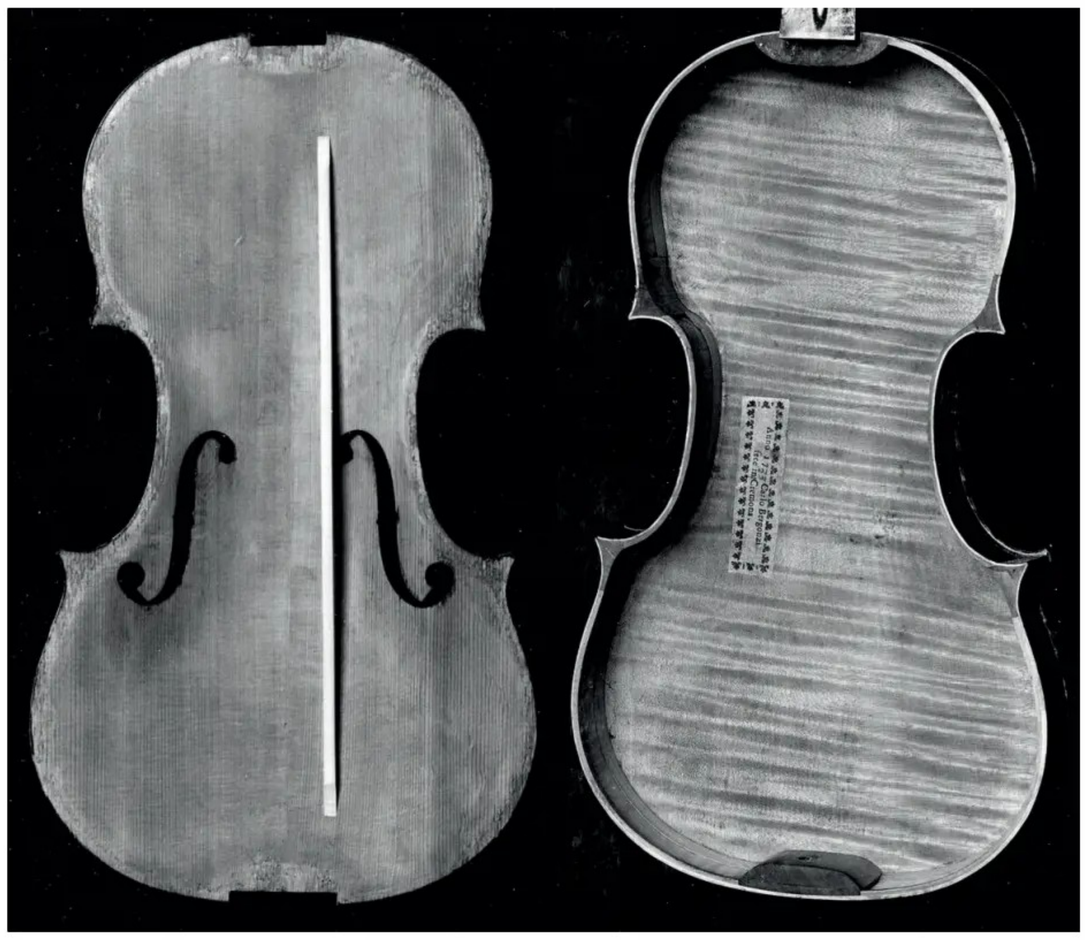
PROVENANCE

The ‘Salabue, Martzy’ may well be the best-preserved Bergonzi violin in existence. Without a single crack to the front or back, and with plentiful and untouched, dazzling red varnish, this remarkable Bergonzi has inspired collectors and players alike for nearly three centuries.

The first to fall in thrall to the violin was none other than the instrument connoisseur and collector Count Cozio di Salabue. In Cozio’s notes, known as the Carteggio, he remarked that this violin was ‘intact’ and called it ‘my largest and most beautiful Bergonzi’. Cozio acquired the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ in 1776 from Bergonzi’s son-in-law, Giovanni Battista Cabrinetti, and kept it for at least four decades until selling it to the collector and dealer Luigi Tarisio.

Tarisio was good at both buying and selling, but perhaps his greatest talent was the art of myth-making. Although he sold many great instruments during his lifetime, he also curated the expectation that he owned other, even better instruments – like the ‘Messiah’ – that might, possibly, come up for sale later. By the time he died in 1854, his collection had become legendary. Within days of Tarisio’s death, the Parisian dealer

THE INFLUENCE OF VINCENZO RUGERI IS DETECTABLE IN THE HEAD, PARTICULARLY IN THE FORMATION OF THE FINAL TURNS OF THE VOLUTE



The interior of the violin, showing the top plate with bass-bar attached, and the black plate with Bergonzi's original label *in situ*

ARTHUR HILL PLACED THE VIOLIN AMONG THE 'FOUR FINEST EXAMPLES OF BERGONZI'S WORK KNOWN TO US'

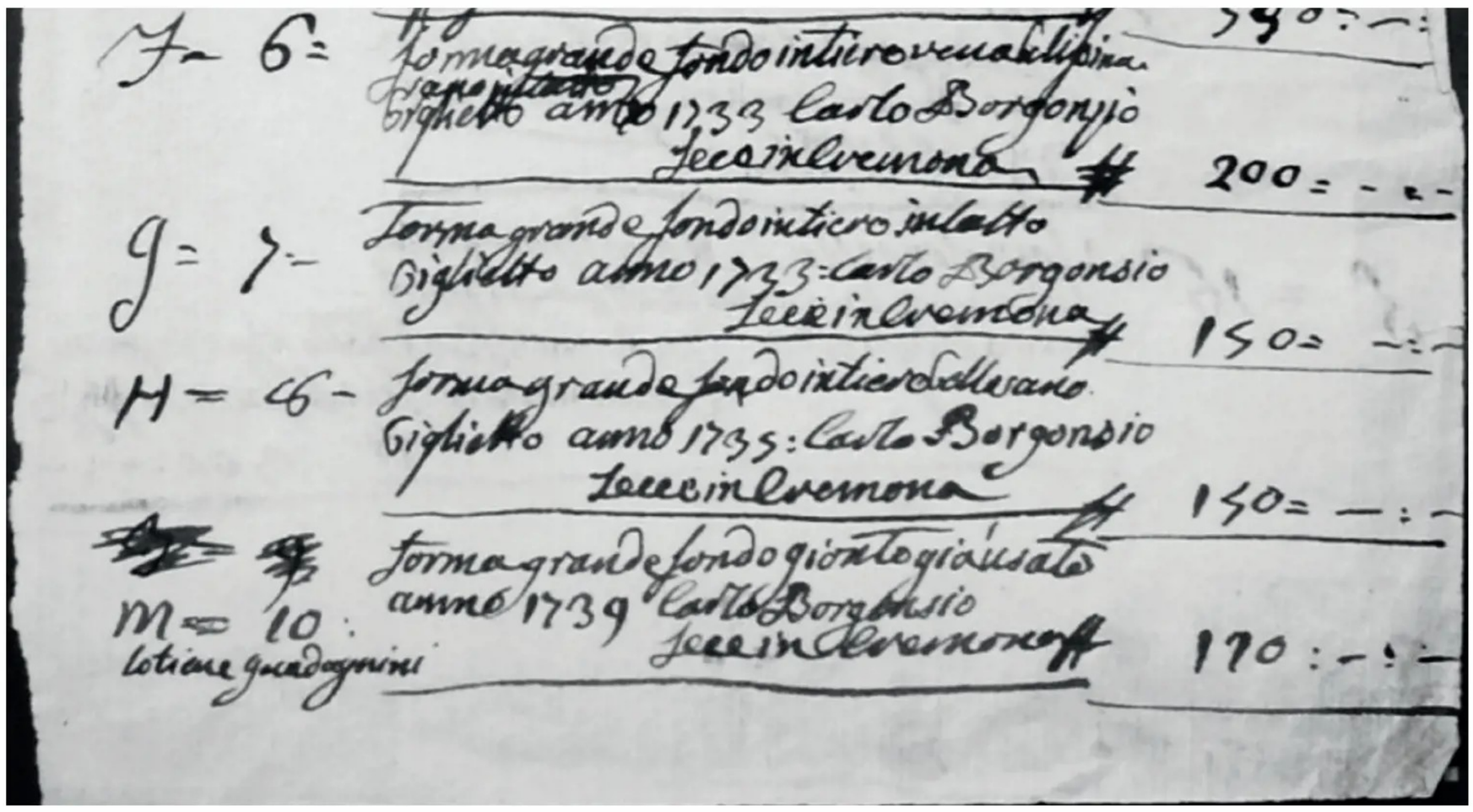
Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume came to Milan and bought the entirety of his collection for 80,000 francs. Among the instruments that Vuillaume acquired were the 1742 'Alard' Guarneri, the 1716 'Messiah' Stradivari and the 'Salabue, Martzy'.

Five years later, Vuillaume sold the 'Salabue, Martzy' to the German violinist Hugo Wehrle, a student of Vuillaume's son-in-law, Jean-Delphin Alard. From Wehrle the violin passed to Julius Schloming, a violinist from Hamburg who was a concertmaster and the second violinist in Florian Zajic's string quartet; and in 1904 the violin was sold to Baron Alfred von Liebig through the Viennese violin maker and dealer Carl Hermann Voigt. Baron Liebig had made his fortune in sugar manufacturing and served as the German Consul General in Vienna. In addition to the 'Salabue, Martzy,' the Baron owned two 1704 Stradivari violins (the 'Glennie' and the 'Liebig, Schneiderhan') and the c.1727 'Lenau' Guarneri 'del Gesù'.

The English dealers W.E. Hill & Sons knew of the 'Salabue, Martzy' from when it was still in the possession of Wehrle and they had, in fact, tried to acquire it in around 1890. Arthur Hill called it 'one of the finest Bergonzis in existence' and placed it among the 'four finest examples of Bergonzi's work known to us'. The Hills also provide an interesting clue as to the transfer of the violin after Baron Liebig died in 1930. In 1934, Arthur Hill writes that '[the American dealer and collector] Nathan Posner has returned from the Continent where he does not appear to have had much success in as much as the "Wehrle" Bergonzi… has slipped through his fingers'.

In 1936, the violin was sold in Zurich by Hug & Co to Daniel Tschudi, an amateur violinist and the heir to a publishing house in Glarus, Switzerland. Although just 28 years old when he bought this instrument, Tschudi had already developed a keen eye and an appreciation for fine instruments. In 1942 he published a small monograph on his prized Bergonzi.

In 1949 Tschudi invited the Hungarian violinist Johanna Martzy to give a concert in Glarus through the local concert and performance society of which Tschudi was an organiser. Tschudi must have been impressed by Martzy's playing because shortly after the concert he asked her if she wanted to borrow his treasured Bergonzi. ▹

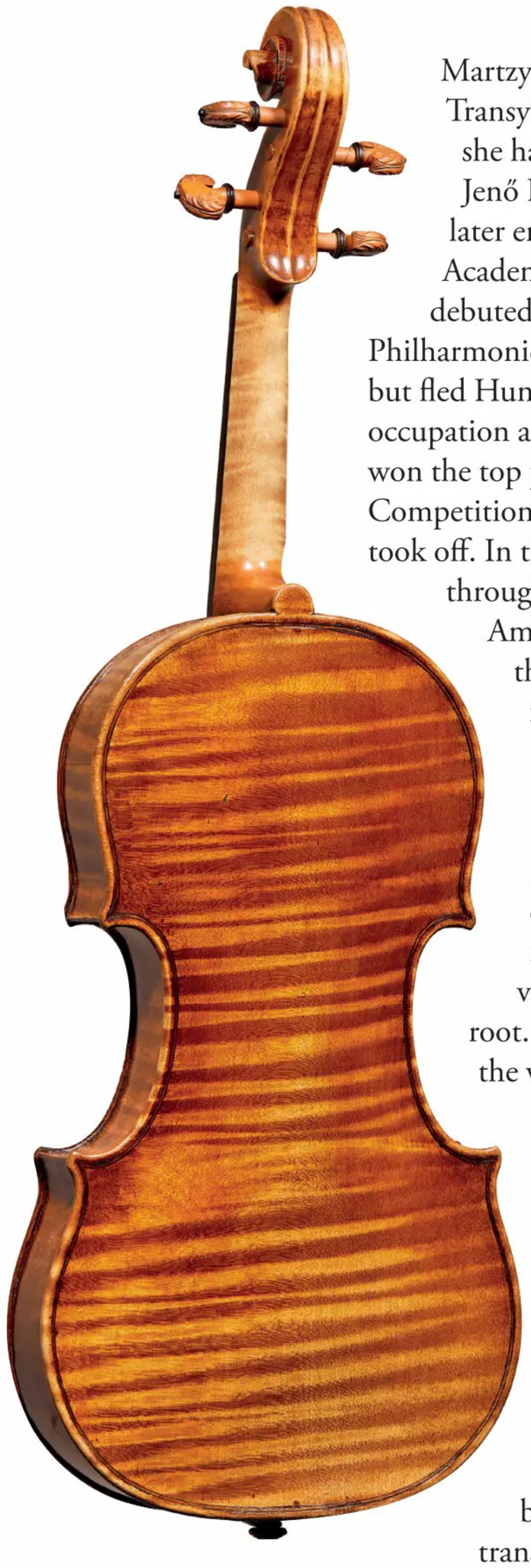


Cozio's inventory of 21 June 1778 describing the 'Salabue, Martzy' as 'large model, one-piece back, mint condition' *(Forma grande, fondo intiero… intatto)*

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY TARISIO

The Zajic Quartet in Hamburg in c.1890. *Left–right* Michael Löwenberg, Florian Zajic, Julius Schloming and Albert Gowa. With its deep ribs and seemingly full varnish, could this be the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ pictured with Schloming?

Johanna Martzy examining a score in preparation for a recording



Martzy was born in 1924 in Transylvania. As a small child she had played for the violinist Jenő Hubay in Budapest and later entered the Budapest Academy of Music. In 1943 she debuted with the Budapest Philharmonic under Willem Mengelberg but fled Hungary after the Nazi occupation a year later. In 1947 Martzy won the top prize in the Geneva Competition and from then her career took off. In the 1950s she toured widely through Europe and debuted in America in 1957, playing with the New York Philharmonic first in November and then again in December the following year.

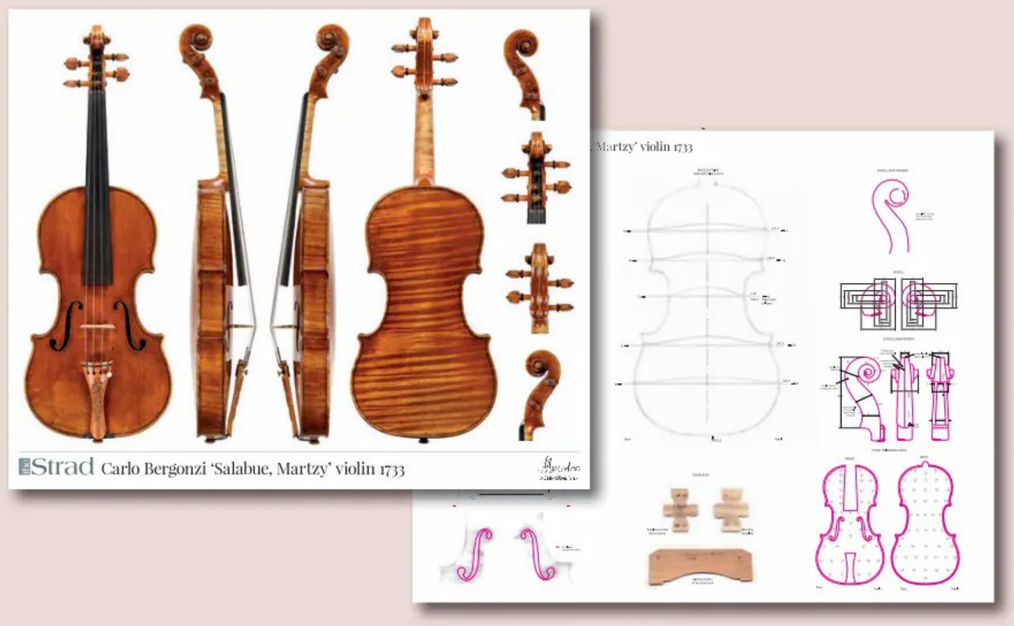
Martzy’s performances and recordings attracted critical acclaim and yet her reputation as a leading violinist never fully took root. This was partly the result of the war, which interrupted her career at its formative stage, but also due to her own retreat from concertising after the birth of her daughter Sabina in 1960. In an article in *The American Scholar*, Sudip Bose makes the case that Martzy was ‘caught between eras’, and that the transition to stereophonic recording made her earlier monophonic recordings unpopular even as she was at the height of her career. The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould called Martzy ‘the most underrated of the great violinists of our age’.

In recent years, Martzy’s recordings have achieved cult status among audiophiles. Ironically, her monophonic recordings now sell for huge sums online. After Martzy’s death, her daughter Sabina sold the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ through the dealer Pierre Gerber to a Swiss foundation. In 1992, the violin was sold to a collector in Japan. In 2011 it was sold to an important North American collector and in 2022 it was sold through Tarisio by private sale.

The ‘Salabue, Martzy’ is featured in several important publications including Christopher Reuning’s excellent catalogue to the 2010 exhibition *Carlo Bergonzi: A Cremonese Master Unveiled*; a monograph written by Eric Blot in 2003; the monograph published by Daniel Tschudi; and in Walter Hamma’s 1964 *Meister Italienischer Geigenbaukunst*. ●

PURCHASE THE STRAD POSTER

Subscribers to *The Strad* receive a folded copy of the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ poster. To order a rolled copy from The Strad Shop, please visit bit.ly/3WQAfWV



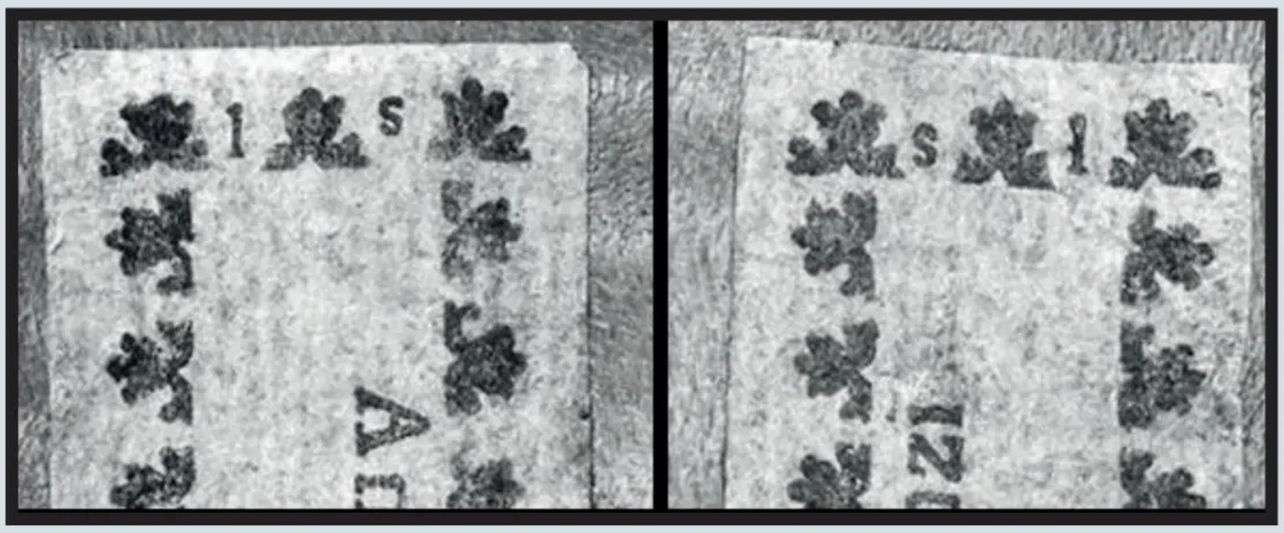
AN UNUSUAL LABEL

The 'Salabue, Martzy' is one of only a dozen or so Bergonzi violins that has an original label. Close examination reveals several unconventional aspects of the label's format and typography. Typically, violin labels begin with the maker's name: for example, 'Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis...' or 'Joseph Guarnerius fecit Cremonae...' All the Cremonese families before Bergonzi had composed their labels this way, and in fact few makers anywhere broke with this convention until the 20th century. But for some reason Bergonzi started his labels with the date: 'Anno 17__ Carlo Bergonzi fece in Cremona.'

The original label of the 'Salabue, Martzy'. The syntax is unusual: there is no mention of Bergonzi's training or background, and details of the typography raise interesting questions

The text of his label is also notably short. Being the first violin maker of his family he had no reason to name his father, brother, uncle or grandfather as the second and third generations of the Amati and Guarneri families did. Still, he could have used this opportunity to assert his pedigree and bolster his bonafides, perhaps by telling us something about his training. It was common practice in the 17th and 18th centuries that first-generation makers named their teacher on their labels. Andrea Guarneri, G.B. Rogeri, Bartolomeo Pasta and Giacomo Gennaro all identified themselves as alumni of Nicolò Amati. Why didn't Bergonzi tell us who his teacher was? The first Bergonzi labels appear in instruments made when the maker was already in his late forties. Perhaps by this point he was well established and didn't need to name-check his master as a younger maker would do. Bergonzi turned 50 in the year the 'Salabue, Martzy' was made: he was creating masterpieces that rivalled the best makers in town and had no reason to tell us who his teacher was.

Another interesting aspect of this typography is that Bergonzi was the first Cremonese maker to use a label with a decorative border. What was his inspiration? Perhaps he had seen the labels of his Venetian contemporaries Carlo Tononi and Pietro Guarneri, who both started using a label with a similar ornamented border a decade or so earlier. Or perhaps his inspiration was more local. Original labels from Vincenzo Rugeri are rare and yet I am curious as to why so many facsimile labels of Bergonzi's presumed teacher have a decorative border not so dissimilar to that of Bergonzi. Did Rugeri also use a label with a decorative border but for whatever reason, no originals of this format have survived?



The two letters inserted into the border are too conspicuous to be unintentional

There are two known variants of Bergonzi's labels: one he used before 1730 and the other thereafter. The text and typography are the same, but on his second label, which is the type used in the 'Salabue, Martzy', Bergonzi inserted two letters between the decorative elements of the label's border: an S and an I (or an S and a lower-case L). The letters are too conspicuous to be unintentional. Their inclusion must have been deliberate, but what is the significance?

The other two master makers in Cremona at this time utilised prominent symbols on their labels: Stradivari featured a circular insignia of a cross flanked by his initials "(A†S)" and Guarneri had recently debuted his own new label design in around 1731, which included a cross printed above the letters 'IHS'. Guarneri's monogram has inspired many theories – was it a religious devotional element (*Iesus Hominum Salvator* meaning 'Jesus, Saviour of Mankind')? Historians currently believe it was most likely a reference to a sign or emblem at the location of Guarneri's new workshop.

Bergonzi's new label with the two letters in the border appeared at about the same time as Guarneri's IHS monogram. Might these two letters have served a similar purpose or significance to Guarneri's 'IHS'?

Perhaps 'I S' stood for an abbreviated 'Iesus [Hominum] Salvator'. Or did 'S L' stand for San Luca, the parish in which Bergonzi lived and in whose social fraternity, the Fabbrica di San Luca, he was an active member? I discussed this subject on several occasions with my friend and colleague Carlo Chiesa, the violin maker, researcher and author in Milan. He suggested that perhaps the letters stand for 'Societas Iesu', the Latin name for the order of Jesuits. In the 18th century, as in today, when a name was followed by the letters 'S.I.' (or 'S.J.') this indicated that the person was a member of the Jesuits. Was Bergonzi alluding to a Jesuit connection?

However, it is also possible that these letters – an 'S' and an 'L' (or 'I') – could be just random typography, fillers added to make space between the decorations on a craftsman's label.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY TARISIO

A CLOSER LOOK

The Strad’s lutherie consultant **Philip Ihle** put together this month’s poster of the ‘Salabue, Martzy’. Here he points out several extra details to help luthiers make an exact copy of the instrument

When I studied the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ in New York last year, it was with the aim of learning as much as possible about this beautiful, inspiring violin in order to help me make a close copy. *The Strad*’s latest poster, with all its carefully taken outlines, arching curves and measurements on the back, provides the information we need to build that model.

In the process of studying the instrument I took a number of reference photos. The ten selected here highlight certain details that are not easily visible on the poster, and can further contribute to our understanding of the violin – specifically its varnish and the character of its making.

1 OVERHANG AND RIB MITRES

The outline is very similar in proportion to a P-form Stradivari. It is only 1-2mm shorter, with much longer C-bouts and less recurve in the corners. The overhang looks small, especially in combination with the edge thickness of up to 5mm. The rib mitres are stout. Because I had a little spare time, I made some templates of these as well, which can be seen on the poster.

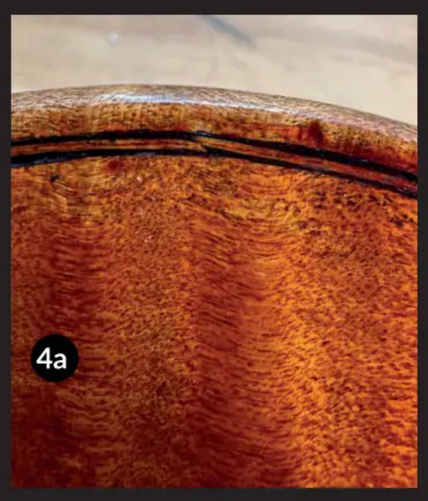
2 F-HOLES AND SURFACE TEXTURE

The f-holes sit in a low and gentle arch. The cut is clean and the walls are almost parallel and perpendicular to the arch. The broad lower wing is lightly fluted. I took a rubbing of the f-holes, which *The Strad* uses for producing the outlines on the back of the poster. Templates made from rubbings differ greatly from those made following a photo. On this gentle arch, however, the difference will be relatively small.

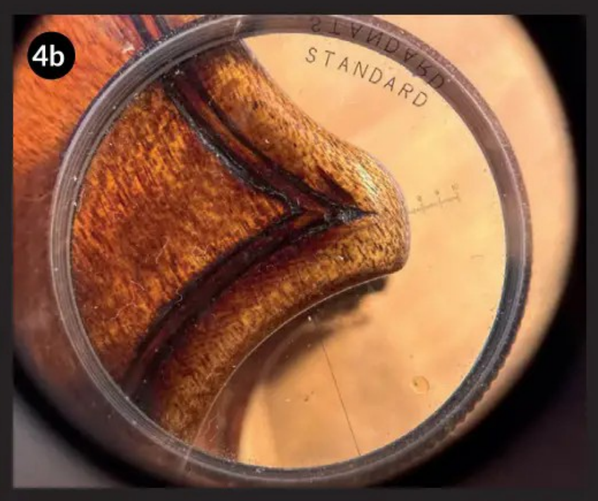
3 THE VOLUTE

The first turn of the volute shows strong toolmarks from a flat tool. On this close-up we can also see the moderate depth and gentle sweep of the fluting.

ALL PHOTOS PHILIP IHLE



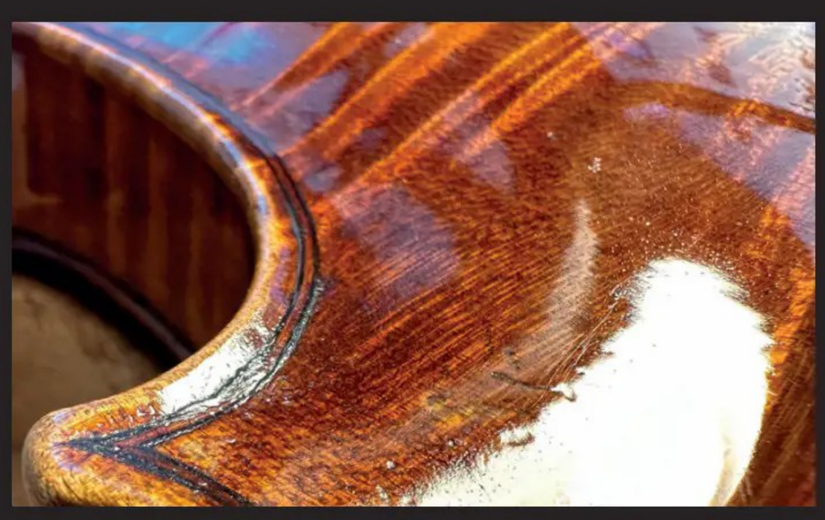
Irregular purfling



The bee-strings point towards the centre

4 PURFLING AND BEE-STINGS

The purfling is irregular; the black lines vary greatly in widths and have a frayed, untidy character (4a). One possible cause may be that the strip was standing proud in the varnishing stage, maybe due to its behaviour when finishing and colouring the wood ahead of varnishing. The wood finish usually involves wet or dry abrading of the wood, and the purfling can ‘swell up’, especially if water is involved.
The corners are short and stout, with the bee-stings pointing towards the centre (4b). There is no deviation from the outline.



5 VARNISH SURFACE FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE

At an angle, the dark flame turns into an intense orange. According to the varnish expert Pierre Flavetta, this may be down to the staining of the wood. The varnish surface shows a history of over-polishing, but the purfling is still raised in spite of this, giving it this ‘frayed’ appearance.

Upper bout rib

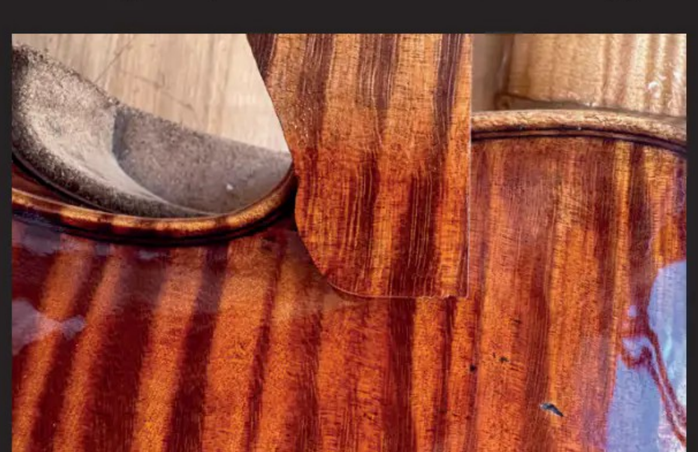
C-bout rib looking down

6 HIDDEN SPOTS AND EDGEWORK

These close-ups show details that rarely get the spotlight: the tighter bends of the C-bout ribs. The varnish is intact with hardly any wear, and there is quite a large build-up of patina. Also beautifully visible is the inside chamfer of the back plate and a rather wonky rib mitre, when compared with the rib in the upper bout (6a). On 6b I wanted to record the broad, flat part in this little-worn section of the edge of the back.

7 VARNISH SAMPLE COMPARED WITH THE BACK

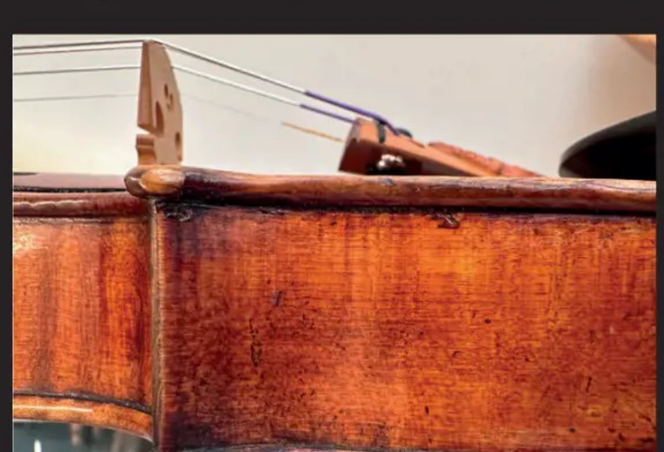
The pores of the maple are extremely open and colourful, which results in a strong, high-definition look. The medullary rays are long and light. The intense orange colour is in the wood and penetrates deep into the flames. Compared with other classical Cremonese violins there is not much difference in colour where the colour varnish has worn off to the wood, because such a great part of the colouration happens in the wood.



Ahead of my trip to study this violin, I prepared a number of sample pieces, and found the ones with strong HD look and orange varnish in the flame worked best.

8 LOWER BOUT RIBS

Again we see the small overhang, the substantial edge height, and a wide inside chamfer on the back, cut at a very flat angle, which can also be seen at the corner. However, I chose this spot because it shows how the layers of colour varnish and patina are wearing off softly from a black–brown down to a light orange spot in a natural, subtle way.

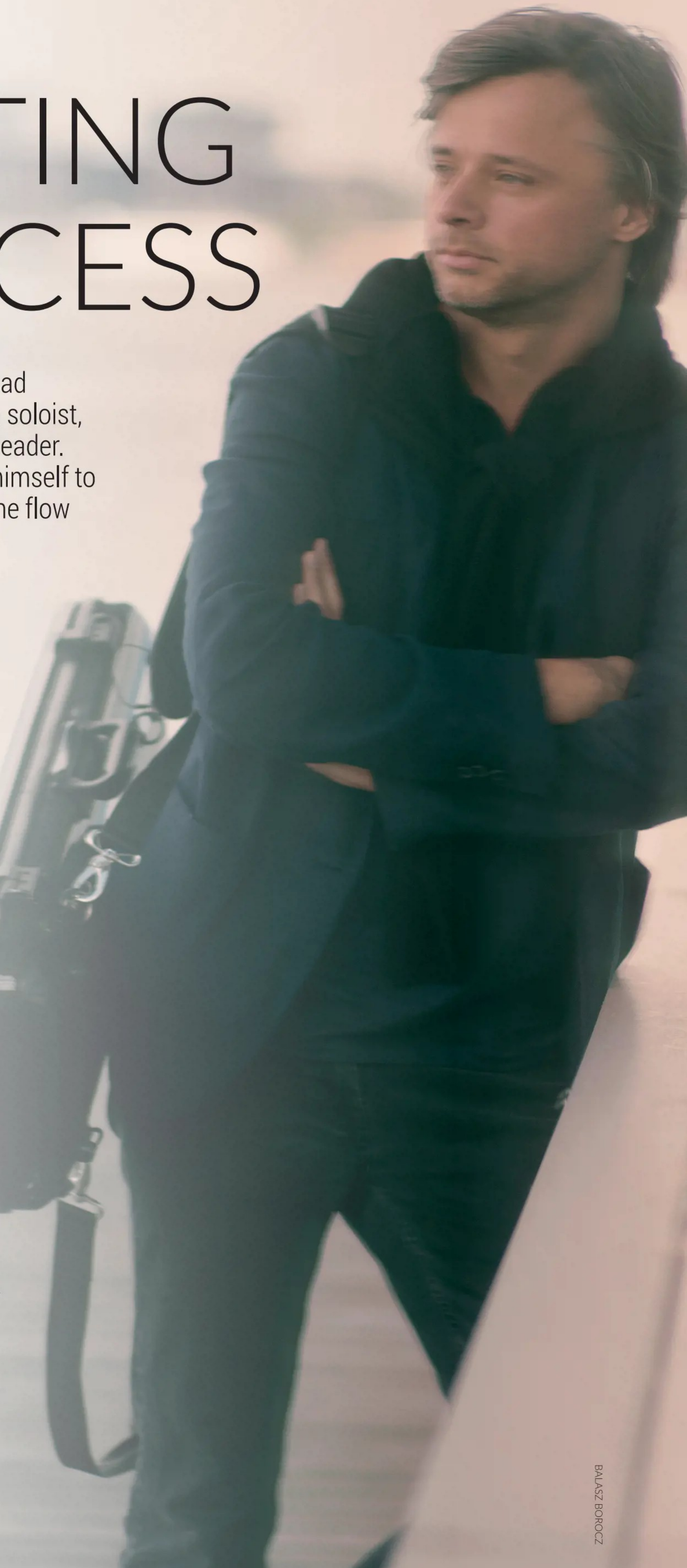


Many thanks for the generous help of Rare Violins of New York, for providing me with access to study the ‘Salabue, Martzy’ Bergonzi

DANIEL ROWLAND

REFLECTING ON SUCCESS

Dutch–British violinist Daniel Rowland has had multiple strands to his career – among them soloist, concertmaster, festival director and quartet leader. He speaks with **David Kettle** about trusting himself to make meaningful connections and go with the flow



'You might have noticed that I'm always talking.' Daniel Rowland is hardly exaggerating; at least, judging by the intense hour or so we spend in conversation – during which he's disarmingly open and forthcoming about his experiences and activities.

But then again, Rowland's got a lot to talk about. He's kept more than busy in a wide-ranging career as a violin soloist (often directing from the soloist's spot), chamber musician, teacher and festival director, not to mention fairly prolific recording artist. Rowland himself, however, seems somewhat surprised – pleasantly so – at how things have turned out. 'For better or worse, I think I never particularly planned that kind of career path. Most people don't, of course. I guess things just happen. And you go with the flow.'

There's undoubtedly an easy-going aspect to Rowland's outlook. But equally, there's a side that's passionate and driven – by connections with music, across a broad range of styles; and by connections with people, something that emerges as a recurring theme when we speak. Some of those more personal connections, perhaps, are down to Rowland's unusual background. He was born in London but grew up on the continent. 'My father, David Rowland, was quite a successful young composer in London, and he fell in love with a beautiful young lady from the Twente region in the eastern part of the Netherlands. They lived in London for ten years, and when I was three, they made a big move to the small Twente village of Het Stift – I think my mum was a bit homesick, and my Dutch grandpa found us a house to live in.'

As a result – perhaps unsurprisingly – Rowland feels a distinctly international sense of identity. 'If anyone comments on it, they usually say I'm neither completely Dutch nor entirely English. I grew up in our little Dutch village, but I always spoke English with my dad. I think

BALASZ BOROCZ

I somehow idealised England – we'd spend summer holidays in Norfolk or Devon. My name sounds English, but I guess I'm more Dutch. Like everything with me, it's all a bit mixed up and paradoxical.'

It's quite a self-deprecating self-assessment, but perhaps one with some truth to it – as can be seen by exploring some of his activities. But that international outlook nonetheless provided a particularly rich background for Rowland's studies and early career, which was firmly centred in continental Europe. He studied in Amsterdam and Brussels, and took lessons in Paris from Ivry Gitlis, who proved a lasting influence on his playing as well as his musical thinking. More importantly, his European location helped establish a wealth of personal and musical connections with fellow soloists, chamber groups and orchestras that form a framework for his many musical activities today.

First and foremost among those 'connected' fellow soloists is Rowland's wife, Belgrade-born cellist Maja Bogdanović. 'She's just the most tremendous musician. She's from Serbia, but she spent almost 20 years in Paris: she went there as a teenager, when the war in her home country was still raging. [The 1990s was a complex time to be growing up in any Yugoslavian country, of course.] She has a kind of Balkan fire and virtuosity, but she also adores chamber music. So as soon as we got together, we started playing all the duos for violin and cello, and gave many chamber concerts at European festivals.'

Rowland and Bogdanović still perform regularly as a duo (they released a CD, *Pas de deux*, in 2020). 'I think we have an interesting chemistry – we seem to offset and counterbalance each other nicely. I'm hugely passionate and intense and virtuosic, and Maja can be the same, but she also knows when to temper things a little bit and be pragmatic about the music. My way of playing is sometimes in the moment, for better or worse, but then she can have more of a gravitational pull back down to Earth.'

How do they manage to separate their musical and personal lives?

'Separate? I don't think we do!' Rowland laughs. It doesn't even sound like they can. 'If we're at home, we might be rehearsing, then picking up the kids from school, then even flying somewhere together. Sometimes we joke that we'd better make our marriage a happy one, otherwise we're doomed professionally.'

Luckily, Rowland assures me, it is a very happy one. Their two daughters, aged three and eight months, may be a little too young for formal ▹

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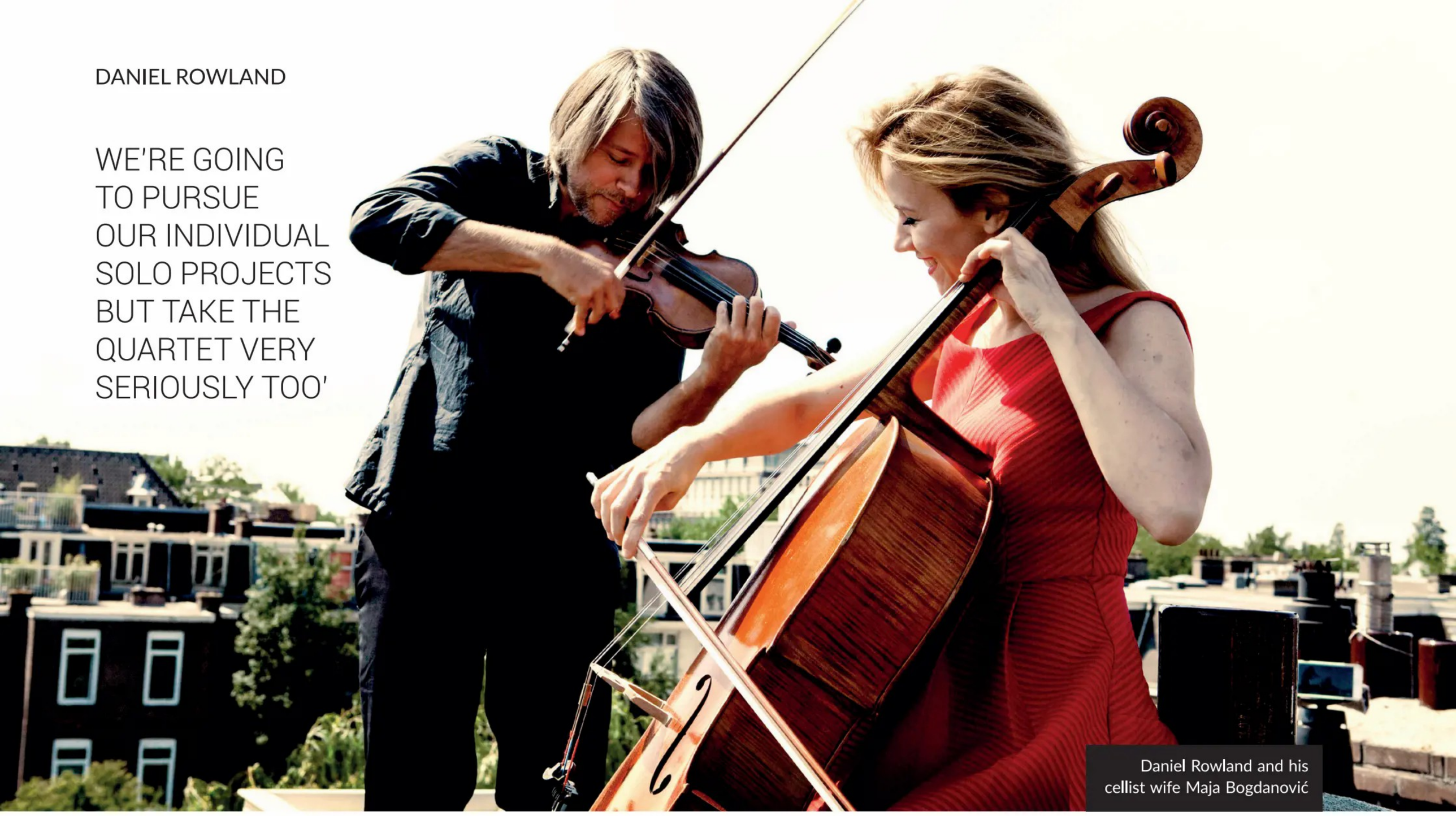
DANIEL ROWLAND

WE'RE GOING TO PURSUE OUR INDIVIDUAL SOLO PROJECTS BUT TAKE THE QUARTET VERY SERIOUSLY TOO'



Daniel Rowland and his cellist wife Maja Bogdanović

music lessons, but they are, unsurprisingly, immersed in music at home. 'If you ask my older daughter what she wants to play, she'll say the cello, like her mum – but she often tries out the piano too. And the more modernistic and intense the music that Maja and I play, the more blissfully the two of them seem to lap it all up, and even drift off into a dreamworld. It always makes me wonder about our preconceived ideas of what counts as beauty.'

As well as being spouses, parents and musical partners, however, Rowland and Bogdanović have recently expanded their chamber collaborations into a new string foursome, the Arethusa Quartet. In it, they're joined by two additional regular collaborators: second violinist Floor Le Coultre and violist Dana Zemtsov. 'We'd played together a few times in recent years,' Rowland explains, 'and it felt like there was some real chemistry happening between us, in terms of our sound; and some things were just happening that you'd usually need to discuss. I'd had the idea of us forming a quartet for a couple of years, but I think I was maybe afraid to verbalise it – you don't want to damage something by giving it an official stamp.' Another concern was that none of the four musicians' individual solo careers would be affected. 'But then Dana said: "That's all very clear." What she meant was, "Of course we're all going to pursue our individual solo projects; but at the same time, we're going to take the quartet very seriously too."'

Founded as recently as 2023, the Arethusa Quartet already feels well established across Europe, with performances planned for the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and the US in coming months. A key question, however, was what to call the group. 'Some people suggested the Rowland Quartet,' Rowland remembers, 'but I thought that was just a joke – our name should represent something we stand for.' In the end, their name came courtesy of a Polish composer that Rowland has long admired. 'There's a little piece for violin and piano by Szymanowski called "La fontaine d'Aréthuse" which I've loved since my childhood,' he explains. Its eponymous water nymph is the object of unwanted advances from the river god Alpheus; but when he believes he's finally trapped her, as Rowland relates, 'she changes into water itself and becomes one with the river, untouchable even by the hands of gods.' It felt to him like an apt metaphor for the ceaseless musical investigations that a string quartet carries out. 'The moment you think you've got it, and you know how a piece should be done, you're finished – you're doomed. Every time you think it's reachable, it remains elusive.' The Arethusa Quartet, however, represents just the latest in Rowland's long and significant history of playing in quartets.

Rowland won the Oskar Back competition in Amsterdam in 1995 aged 22, and four years later joined Lisbon's Gulbenkian Orchestra as concertmaster. 'For the first six months in Lisbon ▹

The Arethusa Quartet (*l-r*) Dana Zemtsov, Daniel Rowland, Floor Le Coultre and Maja Bogdanović

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Stefano Scarampella, Mantua 1915 ● J.B. Vuillaume,Paris c.1853 ● Andrea Postachini, Fermo 1810-15 ● Vincent Postiglione, Naples c.1880 ● Antonio Gagliano, Naples c.1820 ● Oreste Martini, Mantua c. 1940 ● Carlo de March, Venice 1966 ● Paolo Vettori, Florence 2018 ● Grubaugh & Seifert, Petaluma 2005 ● English, London c.1760 ● Jules Joseph Grandjon, Mirecourt 1886 ● Matthew Furber, London c.1820 ● Rene Jacqueman, Paris 1933 ● Marco Nolli, Cremona 2004 ● Michele Dobner, Cremona 2007 ● Stefano Marzi, Bibbiena 2017 ● Maurizio Tadioli, Cremona 2003 ● Jonathan Cooper, Maine 2000 ● Hristo Todorov, Cremona 2020 ● Giuseppe Nupieri, Rome 1977 ● Pierre Hel workshop, Lille 1911 ● Raphael Le Cointe, Cremona 2004 ● H. Emile Blondelet, JTL workshop, Mirecourt 1919 ● Eugene Holtier, Cleveland 2019 ● Gabriel Pralea, Ferrara 2013 ● Martin Erician, Piacenza 1961 ● Kurt Moennig, Hamburg c.1940 ● Marco Pedrini, Cremona 2003 ● English, c.1800 ● Lillo Salerno Pforzheim 2024 ● Rainer Leonhardt, Mittenwald 2023 ● Johannes Rubner, Markneukirchen 2023 ● Yanbing Chen, Model Z-2600, Cleveland 2015 ● Clement & Weise, Model 340, Bubenreuth 2003 ● Les ateliers de la Dyle, Brussels 2020 ● Sergio Vespa, Bejing 2020 ● Calin Wultur, Reghin 2020, 7/8 ● Gewa Meisterwerkstatten, "Marko Ackert", Mittenwald 2019 ● Petru Cristian Demeter, Reghin 2022 ● Gewa "Paris Antik" Mittenwald 2022 ● Johann Albrecht, Bayern 2020 ● Sandro Luciano, Model SL350, 2017 ● and many more

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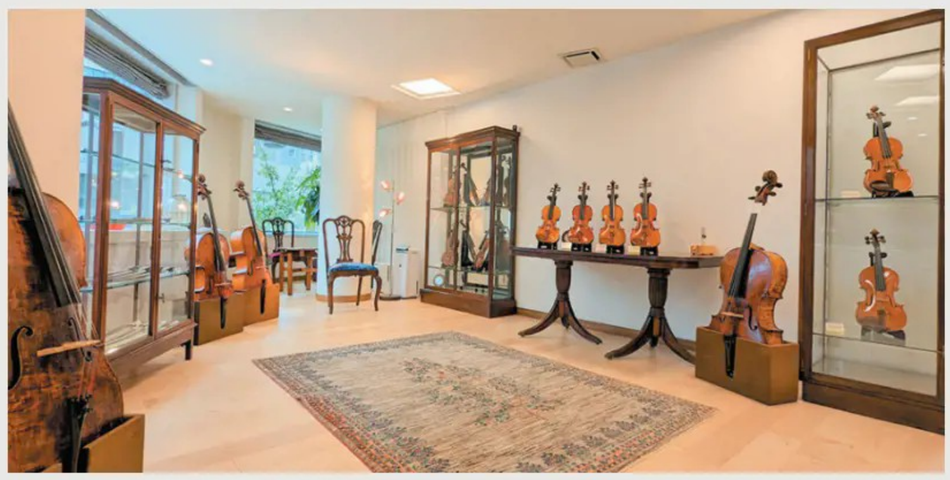

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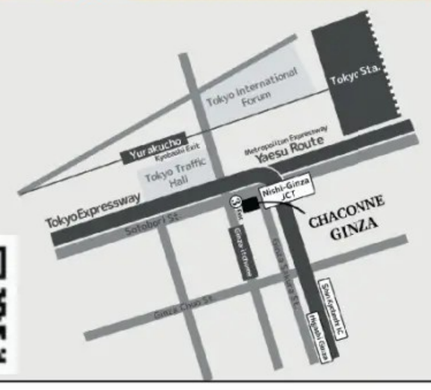

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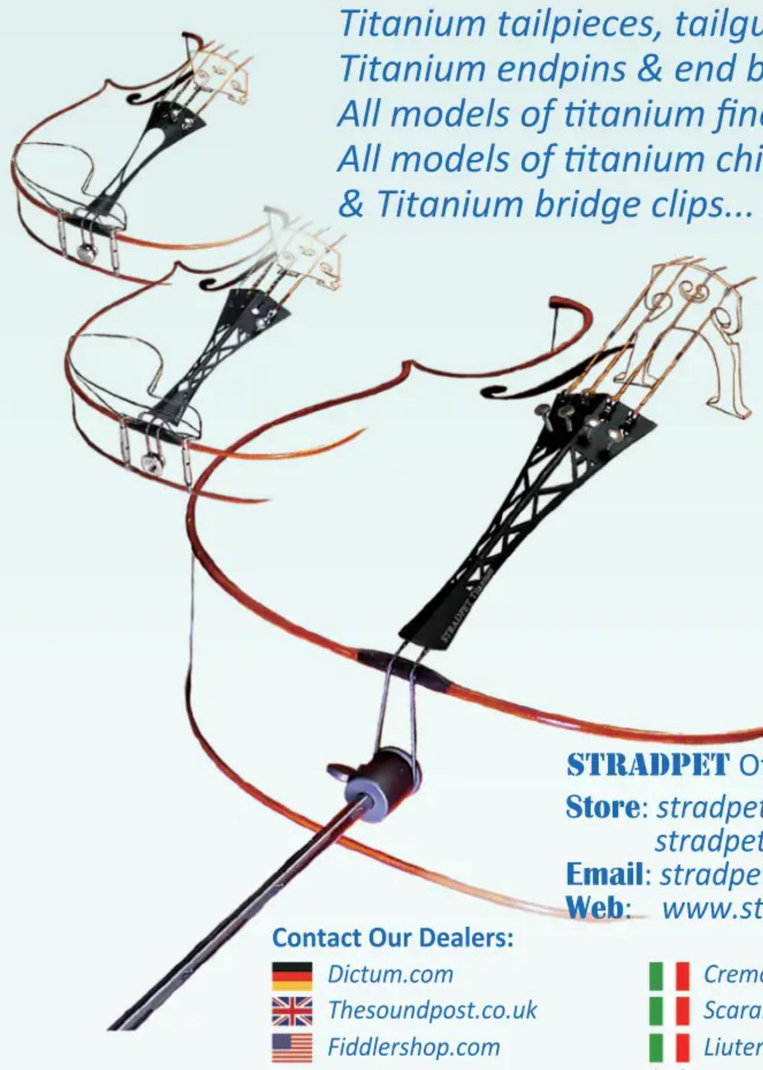

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Rowland performing with the Stift Festival Orchestra

I lived with fado musicians, and, completely by chance, found that I could dive deeply into this desperately romantic kind of music. I absolutely loved it,' he remembers. In 2005 he got a call from the Allegri Quartet in London, which was looking for a new leader. 'I remember doing my last concert at the new Casa da Música in Porto, then jumping on a plane to London. The next day I did my first concert with the Allegri. In one weekend it was like a new era beginning, and with a very distinguished ensemble. But then after a year and a half, the Brodsky Quartet approached me, and I spent twelve years with them.'

He has warm memories of his long time as the Brodsky's leader, and remembers how different it was from playing with the Allegri. 'With the Allegri, there was a strong feeling of daily rehearsals. When I came to the Brodsky Quartet, however, they were still very fanatical and very passionate, but at the same time much more pragmatic: you'd rehearse when you needed to rehearse and work intensively, but then you'd go and do other things. I think if you over-rehearse, you can absolutely kill things – you have to trust instincts, preparation, even the glint in someone else's eye. You can't fix everything in advance.'

And, returning to those all-important personal connections, he remembers an idiosyncratic – and, he says, highly effective – approach within the Brodsky Quartet. 'There's always a question of how social you can be or should be within a quartet. After a concert on tour, we'd always seek out the best restaurant in town and have a wonderful late night there, whether it was in Spain or Italy or Australia. We had fantastic times together. But apart from that, we wouldn't meet at all.'

That fragile balance between belonging and independence is something that Rowland draws particular attention to, especially in the context of quartet playing. 'There's a dichotomy between my feeling of loving being part of a group and feeling completely at home, and not getting edgy if someone seems to stake a claim on me. I love the pride of being in a group, with deepening personal connections. I feel I can flourish in that way – you feel that you're comrades, you're on a journey together, and you have each other's backs. I find that very moving and very wonderful. But I hate it if anyone stakes a claim to exclusive ownership. For better or worse, I can't deal with that. I think I'm a free spirit, in a way. I hate being pigeonholed or put in a box.'

Perhaps that's another side to Rowland's 'mixed up and paradoxical' character that he mentioned earlier. And it's certainly a potential friction that he and the other Arethusa Quartet members have actively looked to address. Despite his twelve fulfilling years with the Brodsky Quartet, however, in the end it was simply the sheer breadth of his activities that encouraged Rowland to narrow his focus. 'I was trying to manage three different diaries: one for the Brodsky, one for my solo playing and one for my festival. I ended up thinking, "Perhaps three is a bit too much. Maybe I should go back to two."'

'I'M A FREE SPIRIT, IN A WAY. I HATE BEING PIGEONHOLED OR PUT IN A BOX'

Rowland had launched his Stiftfestival in 2005, and from the very start it had had a deeply personal resonance. 'It's based in and around a medieval church – the Stiftskerk – that I could see from my bedroom as a three-year-old,' he explains. 'I played my first recital there when I was about 16. Then in the spring of 2005, I played there in a quartet with friends. I remember we came out of the church into a beautiful sunny day with all the flowers and ancient trees, and we said to each other: "This would be a dream location for a festival."'

ȘERBAN MESTECĂNEANU

The inaugural Stiftfestival took place just a few months later, in August 2005. 'We started quite small, with just four or five concerts.' Since then, it's grown hugely, so much so that Rowland now organises three events across the year: his original summer festival; Stift Musical Encounters – a combination of tutoring, masterclasses and performances which takes place in the spring; and the Midwinter Festival just after Christmas.

Rowland's aims, however, have remained largely unchanged since 2005. They're mainly a reflection of his personal musical passions: to bring together established classics and a healthy dose of new music, international performers and emerging artists, performance and education. So personal is the festival to Rowland, in fact, that he chose its 2021 edition as the setting for his marriage to Bogdanović. This year, the festival marks its 20th outing, with a particularly impressive programme including Britten's *Noye's Fludde*, a hip-hop Handel *Messiah*, a new chamber opera charting the history of the festival itself, and Osvaldo Golijov as an especially high-profile featured composer.

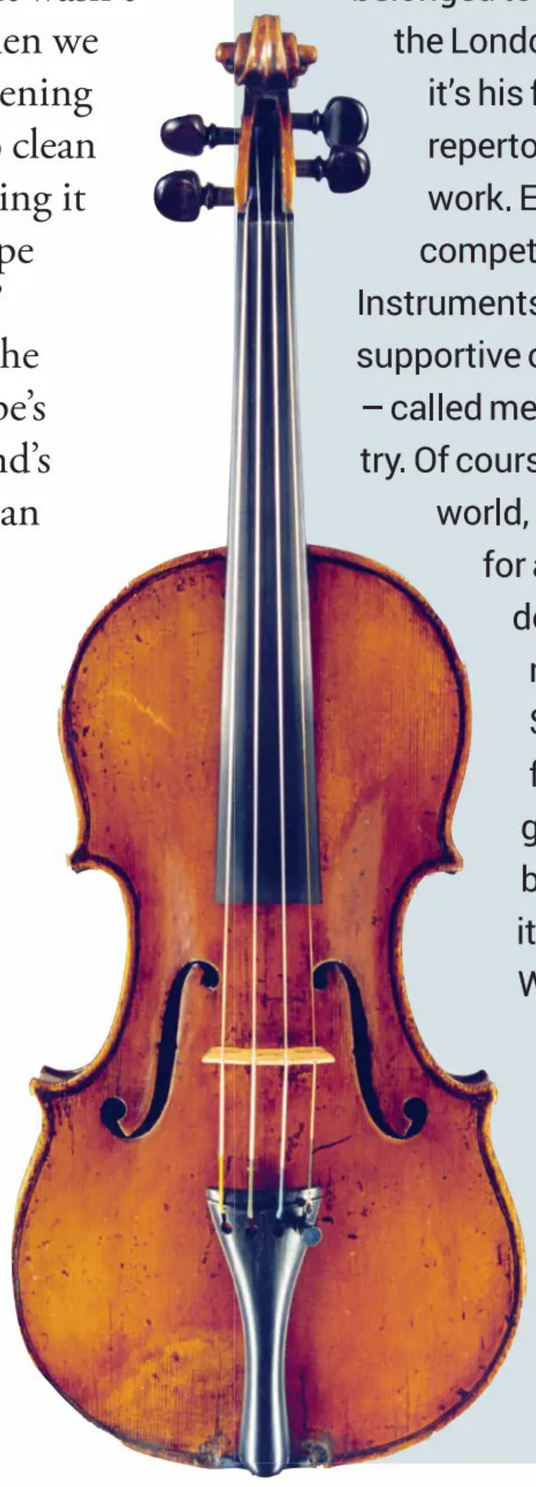
It was shortly after last year's festival that Rowland recorded his latest CD, of Max Richter's *The Four Seasons Recomposed*. He'd given a live festival performance with the event's festival orchestra of friends, professionals, emerging players and students, and he wanted to capture a similar spirit on disc. 'We did it right after the festival, and in a single day. It wasn't easy: we were trying to get the live atmosphere, but then we also wanted it to be perfect and clean. I remember listening to the edits and thinking: "I wish we had more time to clean it up completely." But there's also the danger of cleaning it up to the point where it loses its life and soul. You hope to find the golden point between those two extremes.'

Rowland's recording is a very different beast from the already iconic account by Daniel Hope. Whereas Hope's is pristine, well oiled, perhaps somewhat cool, Rowland's is red-hot, passionate, but with a healthy dose of human fallibility in place of immaculate perfection – which, Rowland suggests, might well be the point. 'I first learnt the piece about ten years ago for a performance in Poland, and I fell in love with it. I checked out recordings, including Daniel Hope's beautiful, distinguished one, but I ended up thinking there was still something that could be added to this piece. It has so much passion: it's a mix of cool and hot, authentic Vivaldi and psychedelic punk music – even some music you could play in a nightclub.' It's also a piece that Rowland is performing widely in 2024. 'I'm doing it in Belgrade, then in Hungary in July, and in Amsterdam and Madrid with the Stift Festival Orchestra later in the year. People say that once you've recorded a piece you really know it, and it's so true. It's so much fun now because I feel like I'm there with it – I can enjoy it.'

Solo touring, a new quartet, a musical marriage, an apparently ever-expanding festival – if, as Rowland says, his career has been more about going with the flow than setting off down a particular path, it's a flow that's taken him in rewarding directions. 'I think everything in my life has been a combination of coincidence and faith that it simply had to be,' he says. Perhaps it's a mix of chance connections and opportunities, but there's also a clear sense of personal musical passions. As demonstrated by his wide-ranging tastes and activities, Rowland is a musician who follows his heart – in terms of what he does, and who he does it with. 'There's nothing I love more than performing – it's really in my DNA, in my soul. And if I can combine that with doing it with people I love – whether that's professionally or personally – then that's as good as it gets.' ●

ROWLAND'S VIOLIN AND BOW

Rowland feels particularly close to his violin, a 1796 instrument by Cremonese luthier Lorenzo Storioni, which he plays with a bow by 19th-century Mirecourt maker Nicolas Maline. 'I bought the violin in 2006 at Biddulph's in London, and before that it belonged to Gordan Nikolić, who was at that time leader of the London Symphony Orchestra.' And, Rowland says, it's his faithful companion right across his varied repertoire, and across solo, chamber and orchestral work. Even if, as he admits, there might have been competition. 'About ten years ago, the Dutch Musical Instruments Foundation – who have always been very supportive of me [in fact, his bow is on loan from them] – called me up and said they had a "del Gesù" for me to try. Of course, I jumped at the chance. It looked out of this world, like a tiger, and it sounded beautiful. I played it for about two years, but began to realise that I was doing none of the important concerts on it, and none of my recordings. I kept going back to the Storioni. So after those two years, I called the foundation back and said, "Thanks so much, guys, but I'm giving it back. I think it needs to be with someone who's actually going to play it, and I feel more at home on the Storioni."'



What is it about the Storioni that Rowland loves so much? Perhaps, he says, it matches his own personality in some ways. 'It's like my soulmate. Like me, it can be moody and unpredictable. It has good days, and it has bad days. But I think I can tell my own personal story on it.' It's perhaps another personal connection to add to Rowland's already rich catalogue.

TOP PHOTO ȘERBAN MESTECĂNEANU. VIOLIN PHOTO COURTESY BIDDULPH

SAMUEL GRIMSON

TRIUMPH AND *TRAGEDY*

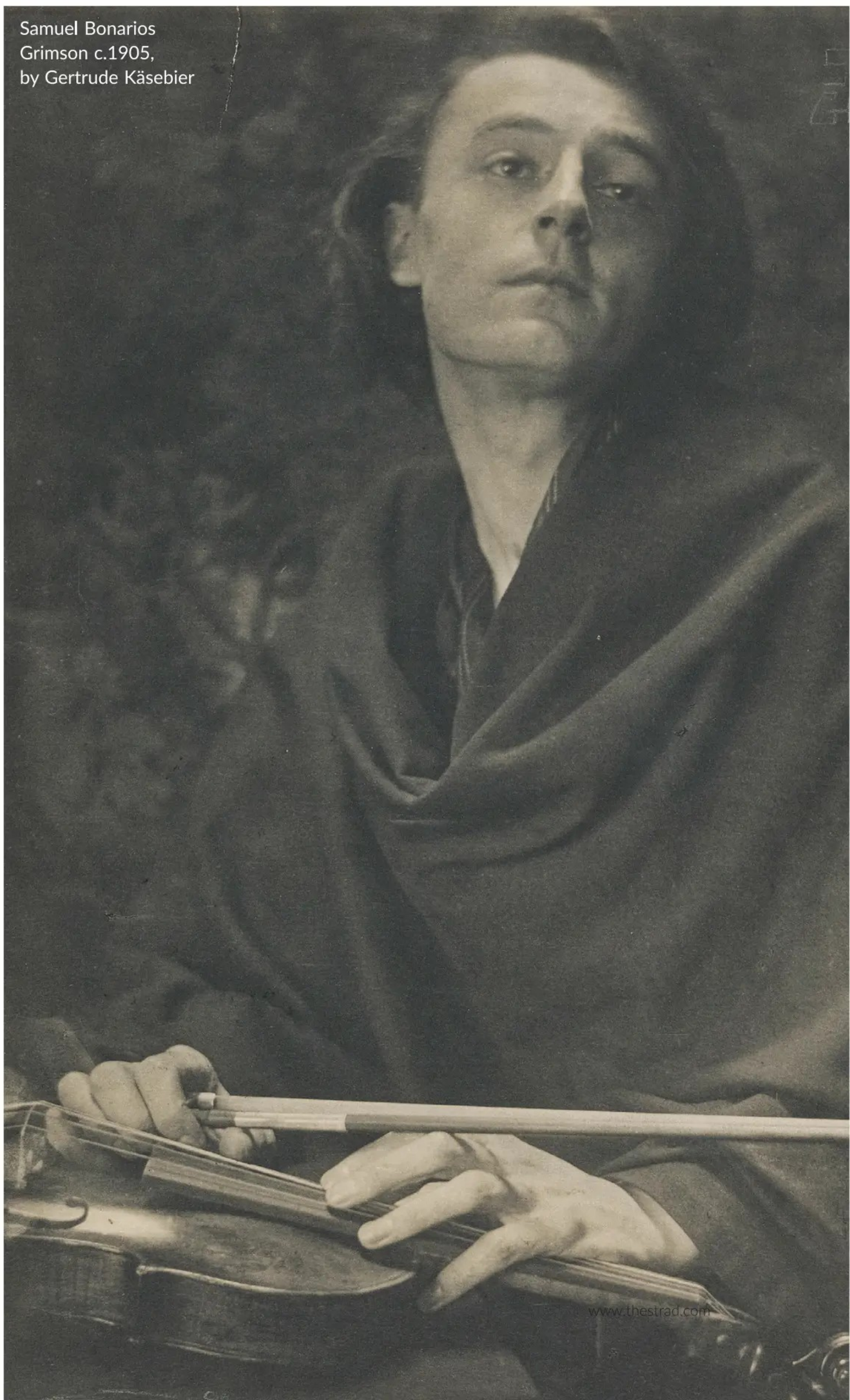
British violin virtuoso Samuel Grimson had his playing career cut short by a wartime accident in 1918, but he went on to co-author a groundbreaking book that paved the way for modern violin teaching. **Clifford Hall** explores his life

Deep in the summer of 1918 in the Italian Alps, the budding concert violinist and pride of Joseph Joachim's teaching studio Samuel Bonarios Grimson (1879–1955) had just taken off his Royal Army Service Corps-issued Brodie helmet to wipe the sweat from his brow. Now part of the Allied advance known as the Hundred Days Offensive, he had been compelled to enlist just a few months earlier after his brother Harold, a violinist with the London Symphony Orchestra (as was Samuel), had lost his life in the Great War.

Having already survived a mustard gas attack in the trenches, Grimson planned to take advantage of 24 hours' leave to make a pilgrimage to Cremona, scene of the golden age of violin making. But then disaster struck – and it happened so fast. An explosion from a German bomb hit his truck and blasted the steel helmet – which he'd been holding in his hand as he stood by the vehicle – into his side, nearly rupturing his abdomen. The force flipped him down a mountainside, and as he fell, he sprained the tendons of his wrists. The plunge knocked him unconscious, and when the cold water of a stream revived him, he realised that his scalp had been half torn off. Luckily he managed to crawl his way back up the hill and was found by his unit before blacking out.

When he woke up in a hospital in Ventimiglia, doctors revealed that he also had broken ribs and a fractured skull. In these times before antibiotics, his wounds became infected, tetanus set in and his body began to spasm uncontrollably. He survived, spending several months recovering in hospital; but it became evident that although his other injuries were healing (though they would leave visible scars for the rest of his life), the tetanus cramps had left his hands rigid and his career as a soloist was over. He was also left with lingering post-traumatic stress disorder.

Despite all this, within two years, his tragically changed circumstances had compelled him to create *Modern Violin-Playing* (1920), the most precise technical guide to playing



Samuel Bonarios Grimson c.1905, by Gertrude Käsebier

DIGITAL IMAGE, THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK/SCALA, FLORENCE

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the violin yet written, about which the *New Music Review and Church Music Review* wrote: 'This startling little book in a way marks an epoch in the science and art of violin-study. For it is the first genuine attempt to remove that subject from the realms of guesswork, and to place it where it should be – in the safe area of scientific *truth*.'

So what led this violin virtuoso with broken hands and the mind of a scientific researcher to write such an original volume?

Grimson was born in late 19th-century London into a highly musical family. Starting lessons at age four with his violinist father Samuel Dean Grimson, he became a child virtuoso, by the age of ten playing for Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle – according to the 1965 memoir *Yesterday Is Tomorrow: A Personal History* by the prominent sculptor Malvina Hoffman, who would later become his wife. Hoffman also wrote about Grimson senior being a 'strict disciplinarian' who trained his seven children 'like a little orchestra'.

With their frequent family performances throughout London, the Grimsons attracted both audiences and the press. A journalist for the London newspaper *The Standard* wrote in February 1898: 'It rarely occurs that all the members of a numerous family are equally gifted in respect of musical talent, but an exception occurs in the case of the Grimson family [...] their *ensemble* was delightful [...] There was a numerous and appreciative audience.'

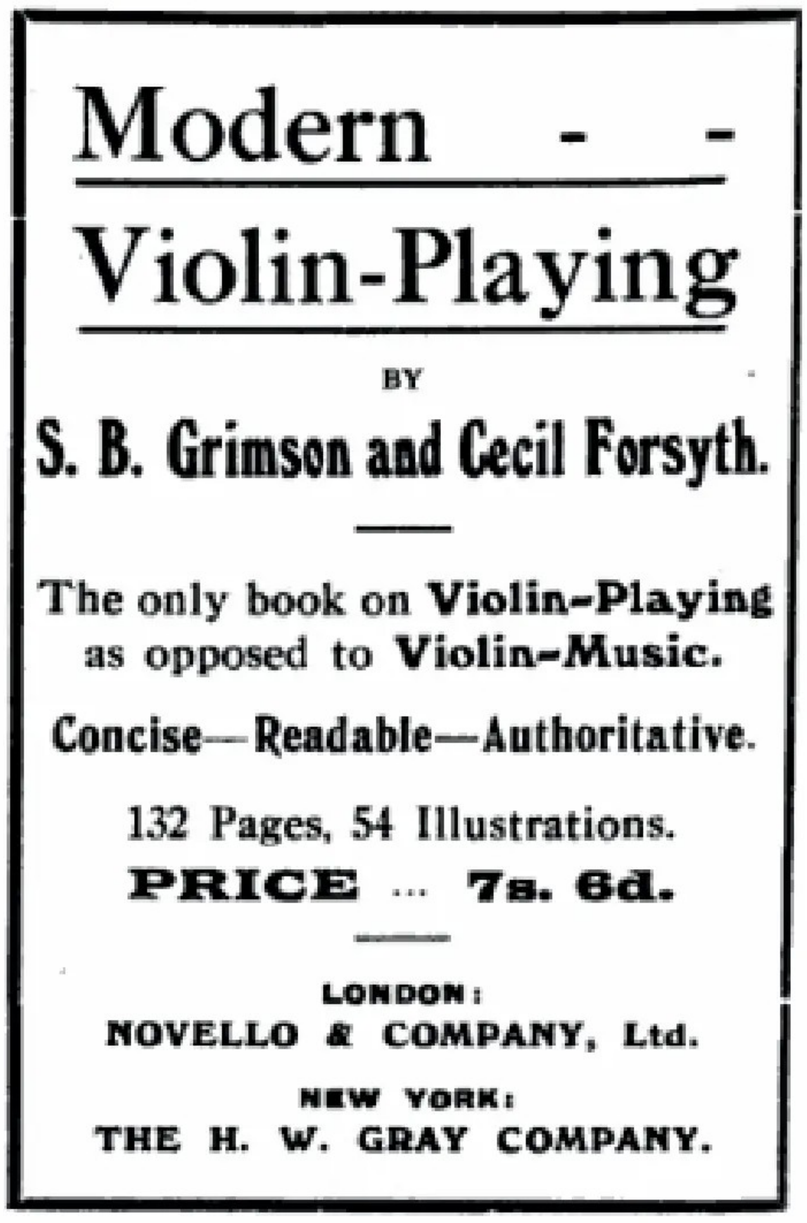
In 1895, at the age of 16, Grimson won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London, along with his cellist brother Robert, composer Gustav Holst and others. He studied there with the Spanish violinist Enrique Fernández Arbós. Two years later, in November 1897, *The Standard* reported he had been awarded the school's highest honour: the Musicians' Company Silver Medal. His recital caused quite a sensation; the *Musical Times* reported in November that, 'Samuel Grimson made light of the terrible technical difficulties of Bach's "Chaconne". He has wonderful fingers has this lad, and we doubt whether the literature of violin music contains anything that he could not master.'

The violin dealer Arthur Hill was also well acquainted with the family, as the elder Samuel Grimson was his childhood violin teacher. He noted the young Samuel's ascension in his journal on 4 December 1897:

> We have sold Mr Grimson for the use of his son, Sam, who is from all accounts, particularly from what Dr Parry and Mr Gompertz say, already a great player, the Maggini violin. We have sold him the violin for £120 as we should like to help him as much as we can. We have known Mr Grimson all his life, and father had more to do with laying the foundation of his success than anybody.

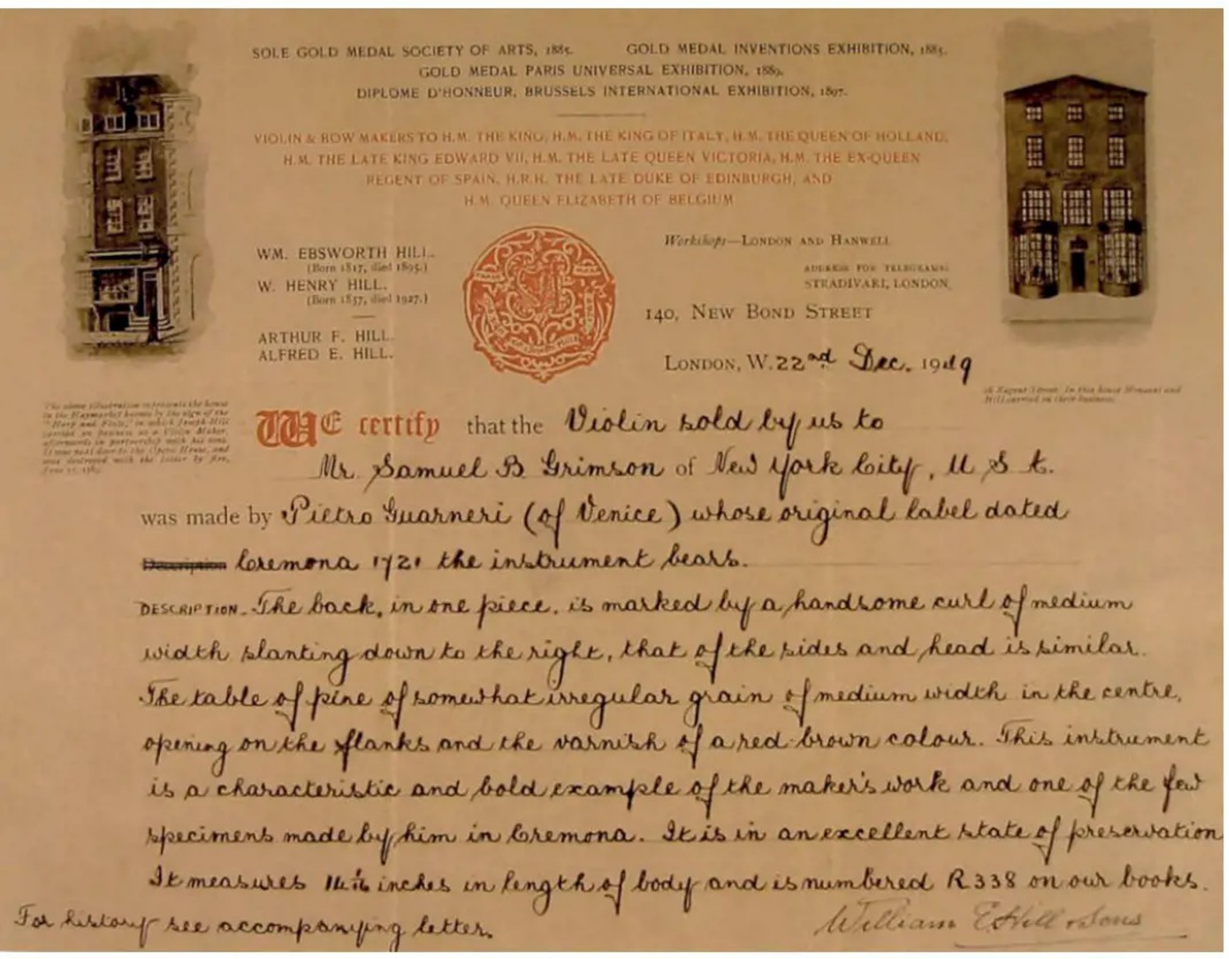
After graduating from the RCM in 1897, Grimson wished to go to Germany to study. His father forbade it, but this didn't stop him, as Hoffman explained in her memoir: 'His sisters, however, were on his side and wanted him to go. He ran away. He left without even an overcoat.'

As a student of Joachim at Berlin's Königliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik (probably 1898–1902), Grimson continued his rise, as evidenced by a letter to Brahms in which Joachim referred to 'Young Grimson' as 'one of my most ▹



An advert for Grimson and Forsyth's *Modern Violin-Playing* in *The Strad*

A 1914 portrait of Samuel Dean Grimson (1842–1922) by Frank Brooks (1854–1937)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BONARIOS GRIMSON
Violinist

Grimson featured on the cover of the *Musical Courier* in 1912

talented pupils'. Backing up his words with actions, Joachim recruited Grimson to play second violin in his own quartet. In December 1901, he made his solo debut in Germany, playing with the Berlin Philharmonic. The following January, the American magazine *Musical Courier* noted, 'Sam Grimson […] made a splendid showing at his concert at the Singakademie last Friday. […] In the Brahms Concerto Mr Grimson was at his best. […] The young violinist was repeatedly recalled and encored.' Later that year, the same magazine reported that, 'Sam Grimson […] will soon travel to the United States.'

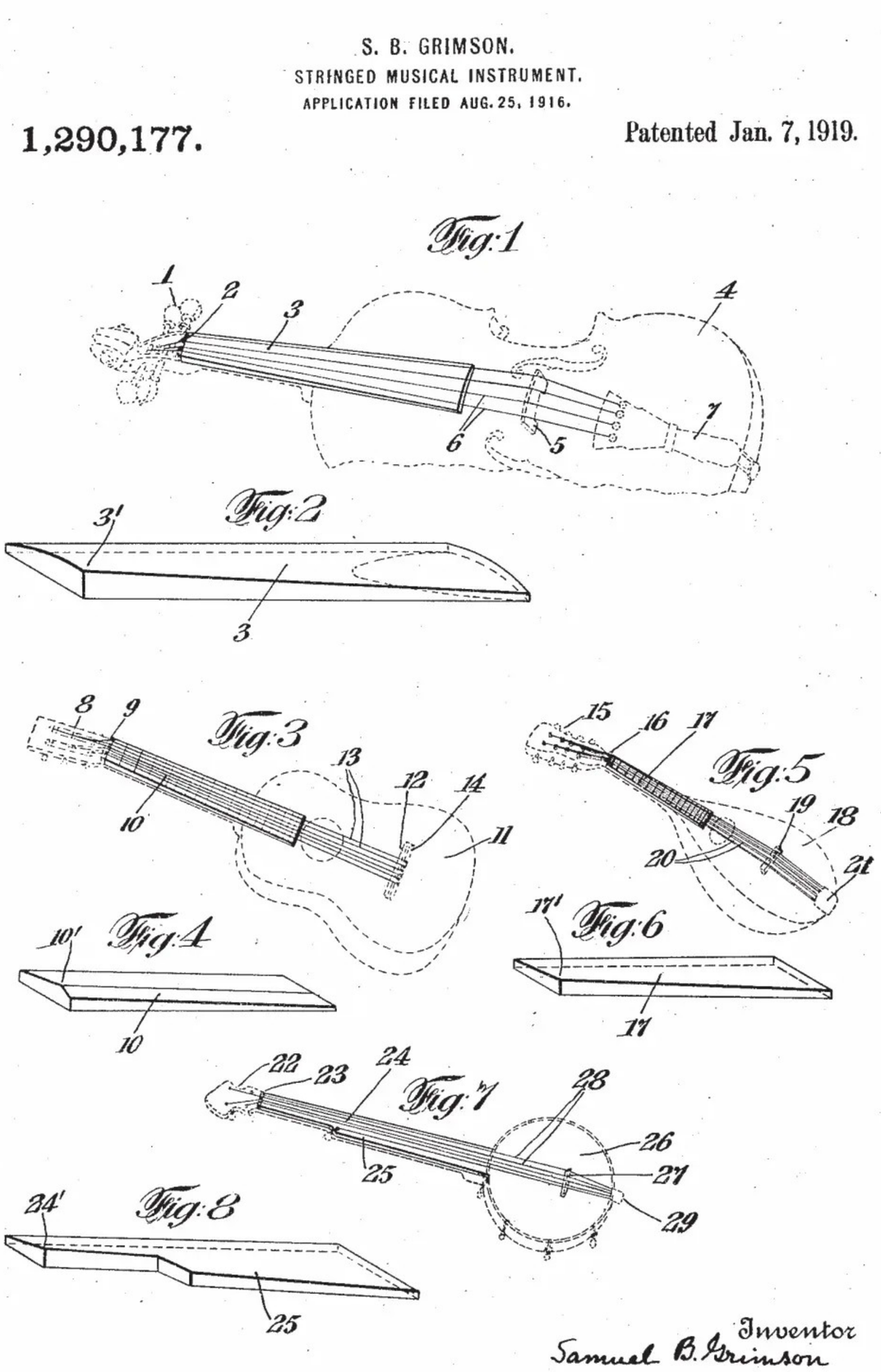
Grimson indeed arrived in New York in August 1902, but initially struggled to find success in America. Although he was diligently preparing for an American debut, he also began to work on another occupation that engaged his analytical side: as an engineer and inventor. He set up the Grimson & Battalia company with Olondo F. Battalia, and in 1908 was granted a patent for a novel electric-lighted sign that was only the first of many inventions for which he would be credited. Impressively, by his life's end, his autodidactic nature would result in his company working on a patent for a wide-screen television, half a century before the rest of the world could catch up with his brilliant mind.

In 1905 he started appearing in salons with Richard Hoffman, an influential English-born pianist and composer who frequently played with the New York Philharmonic. While rehearsing at Hoffman's house, Grimson first caught the eye of his daughter, Malvina (1885–1966). The two bonded and a relationship slowly evolved.

Grimson's big break came in 1912 when he was picked up by the New York management agency Foster and David, which booked him for an appearance with the Philharmonic Society of New York. Its marketing campaign included rebranding him as Bonarios Grimson, using his middle name (which derived from his Greek mother Maria's maiden name, Bonarius) as first name. These moves attracted substantial press, including a September 1912 cover story in the *Musical Courier* in which he further leaned into the romantic archetype as he refused to reveal his biographical data. 'I do not think that audiences care much about when or where an artist was born, but are intensely interested in the question as to how he plays,' he said. Responding to the interviewer's claim that European critics have left no doubt as to how he plays, he said: 'They have been very kind, but I believe that American audiences prefer good performances to good foreign press notices.'

His Philharmonic Society of New York engagement took place in February 1913, and he played the Bruch Violin Concerto. His relationship with Malvina had continued to grow as his star rose, and in her memoir she recalled: 'When the time came, we were at Carnegie Hall to hear him. At the close of the composition, he was recalled five times. I was so proud of him and excited by the whole experience […] Sam had studied much on his own, he had an encyclopedic mind and a phenomenal knowledge of classical music and musical instruments.'

Grimson switched to Gertrude Cowen as his manager, which resulted in his Philadelphia Orchestra debut (with his childhood friend and conductor Leopold Stokowski) in November 1913. Although the public and press called him a master, in the concert programme Grimson said, 'I am only a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STRINGED MUSICAL INSTRUMENT.
APPLICATION FILED AUG. 25, 1916.

1,290,177. Patented Jan. 7, 1919.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

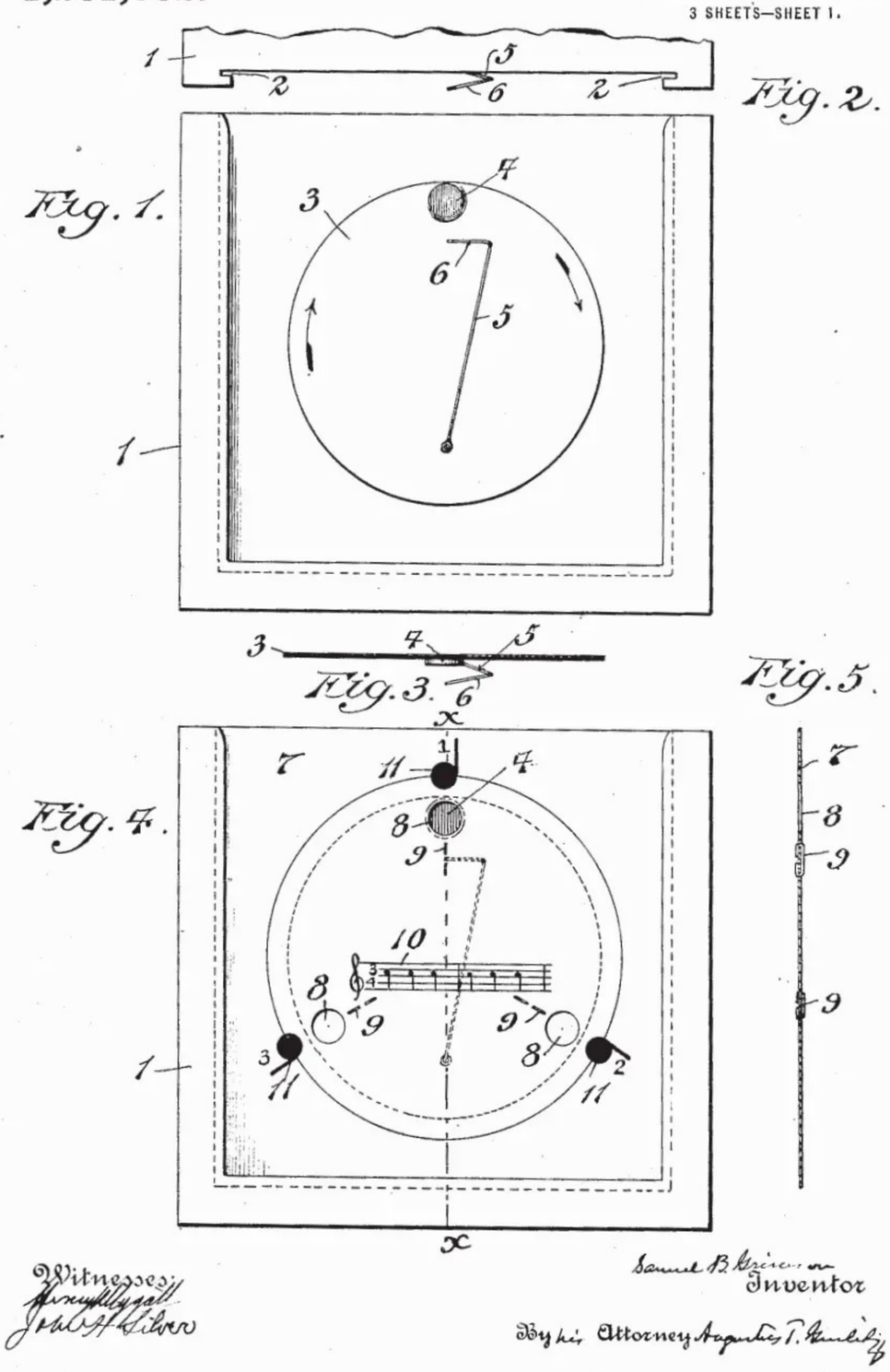
Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Inventor
Samuel B. Grimson
By his Attorney
Augustus T. Gurlitz

Grimson's patent for an ergonomic fingerboard design


S. B. GRIMSON.
MUSICAL TIME AND RHYTHM INDICATING DEVICE.
APPLICATION FILED APR. 1, 1914.

1,261,382. Patented Apr. 2, 1918.
3 SHEETS—SHEET 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 5.

Fig. 4.

Witnesses:
Jesse A. Gilbert

Samuel B. Grimson
Inventor
By his Attorney Augustus T. Gurlitz

Detail from the patent for the Rhythmikon

student. […] What little success I have is due to work, and a love of the instrument. I work harder now than I ever did. I must keep it up. Work means progress; rest means rust.' Grimson continued to tour throughout 1914, starting that year with a performance at the White House for President Woodrow Wilson and an assemblage of Washington's elite.

All the while, he continued to submit patents, including one later that year for the Rhythmikon, a musical time- and rhythm-indicating device that worked like a proto-computer to help students hear the rhythms of tricky passages before playing them. Grimson filed another patent in 1916 for a fingerboard design (which could be adapted to any stringed instrument) that was thicker on the 'thumb side' so that the strings could be depressed with greater ease and less strain upon the wrist. It is no wonder that in the 1920 census he listed 'engineer' as his profession.

Grimson also continued to perform until 1918 when his brother Harold was killed in the Great War and, just months into his enlistment, he received the injuries that ended his playing career.

It was through these converging energies of violin soloist and engineer that Grimson, alongside his co-author the composer, violist and musicologist Cecil Forsyth, penned the trail-blazing 1920 New York publication *Modern Violin-Playing*.

In reaction to the atrocities of the Great War, there had been a significant rejection of classical norms in various domains including art, literature, theatre, music and physics. The state of things was later recalled in *The Memoirs of Carl Flesch* (posthumously published in 1957): 'While the post-war years were not a favourable period for the development of ideal values, it was perhaps my unconscious reaction to the anti-artistic state of affairs that prompted me to write my book *The Art of Violin Playing*.' Flesch himself had indeed broken into the American market not long after Grimson with the first volume of his own highly acclaimed violin treatise (orig. German, 1923; English trans. 1924). Later in his memoirs, Flesch wrote, 'Technical foundations were a secondary consideration in German violin playing during the latter half of the 19th century: the spirit was left to dominate over the fragile ▹

A 1924 sculpture of Samuel Grimson by Malvina Hoffman

matter, the artistic intention was regarded as the main thing, and the result in sound as unimportant.' He sharply criticised Grimson's teacher: 'Josef Joachim, the interpreter of genius and mediocre teacher, was chiefly to blame for this state of affairs. […] The term "technician" was regarded as dishonourable, the artistic intentions as the only thing that mattered, even when they found outward expression in scraping noises. Hence the search for the philosopher's stone as ersatz for the absent solid craftsmanship.'

It was in this context that Grimson and Forsyth had crafted their manual, which was Grimson's one and only foray into violin pedagogy and the first book of its kind. What set it apart from other books at the time was Grimson's uniquely scientific and mechanical approach to the subject, which was in a sense echoed by Flesch in his reflections surrounding Joachim and the German school. The first page of Grimson and Forsyth states:

> The process of learning to play the violin has no *direct* connection with the art of music. It depends for its success solely on the proper understanding and application of the laws of anatomical action. And these, again, are merely specialized examples of the more general laws of mechanics. Till the violinist has mastered these laws and has learned to regard the violin *as a machine*, he should keep all his ideas on the expressive side of music under lock and key.

Contemporaneous reviews of the book were positive, with the English journal *The Musician* going so far as to say, 'Comparing the book with others available, we are willing to go on the record as considering it the most important work of the present period.' Although the book has been analysed since the 1950s, as recently as 2020 (in *Romantic Violin Performing Practices: A Handbook*) David Milsom wrote:

> Grimson & Forsyth begin in a way that conspicuously differentiates them from a mystical past. In drawing an analogy, they relate the tale not of a genius 'virtuoso', or even a skilled artisan, but rather a scientist – an engineer. As they discuss, engineers may find a solution by trial and error, but this would be too hit-and-miss to qualify them as experts. Conversely, they suggest, a violin teacher who has formulated solutions by happenstance is equally deficient, but 'so long as he remains in the genius business, there is not one word to be said against him'.

Although Grimson and Forsyth's book never gained the prominence of Flesch's, nor indeed D.C. Dounis's 1921

Malvina Hoffman and Samuel Grimson around 1919

SCULPTURE PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY/ESTATE OF MALVINA HOFFMAN. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF MALVINA HOFFMAN

'TILL THE VIOLINIST HAS LEARNED TO REGARD THE VIOLIN AS A MACHINE, HE SHOULD KEEP ALL HIS IDEAS ON THE EXPRESSIVE SIDE OF MUSIC UNDER LOCK AND KEY' – *MODERN VIOLIN-PLAYING*

Weds Beside Her Statue of "Sacrifice"

Near the altar at which Miss Malvina C. Hoffman took her marriage vows stood her statue, Sacrifice, which glorifies the part women must play in the tramp of progress.

But New York Sculptress, Pupil of the Great Rodin, Says There Is No Significance in Plighting Her Marriage Troth in the Shadow of Such a Symbol

Like any other bridal pair, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel B. Grimson left the Cathedral of St. John the Divine a bit of self-conscious and smiling after the ceremony

Her hands, with the stigmata of nails in the palms—to show that she also has been crucified—are spread in the gesture of offering a sacrifice.

"Nor did I mean this to be specifically a war memorial. Inspired by the war and its women, yes. But it was meant to symbolize an idea even bigger than the war; the idea of woman's sacrifice, in peace, in war, always and endlessly. My name for it was not 'Sacrifice.' It was 'Doleur est la mere de la beaute'; 'Sorrow is the mother of beauty.'"

"It's so absurd to think I felt I was sacrificing myself," she repeated, returning to the matter of her marriage: "I

News item from *The Tacoma Daily Ledger*, July 1924

'SAM HAD MANY ATTACKS OF DEPRESSION. HIS MOST DESPERATE SADNESS STILL WAS BEING UNABLE TO PLAY THE VIOLIN' – *MALVINA HOFFMAN*

The Artist's Technique of Violin Playing, its influence is in no doubt. Indeed, there are passages in Flesch's book that closely follow Grimson and Forsyth's in both subject and argument.

'It now only remains for us to say that the old maxim "Let the fingers descend like little hammers" is mere thoughtless nonsense. The people who formulated that maxim left the anvils out of account. They also ignored the physical results of contact between hammers and anvils.

But, one may ask, why in the name of common-sense should the fingers descend like little hammers? Why should they violently assault the strings in this way? Their function is to hold the strings down to the finger-board, not to give a xylophone performance. That method of attack leads to an excessive over-thickening of the skin on the fingertips – an over-thickening that Nature herself sets up to protect the violinist against his constant bugbear, exposure of the nerve. Indeed, if one had to describe the proper approach of the finger-tip to fiddle-string, it would not be as one of "hammering," but rather as one of "sensitiveness," even of "inquisitiveness."'
Modern Violin Playing Grimson and Forsyth

'Every finger should drop elastically on the string with its own naturally inherent motive power. I regard exaggerated raising of the fingers as well as "flinging" them on the strings as needless, as a waste of strength, and consequently injurious. The knocking which results from this practice is a decidedly disturbing accompaniment, and, together with the involuntary pizzicati resulting from the sidewise raising of the fingers, belongs to a group of disturbing noises.

Then, too, excessive finger pressure is injurious, giving the tone a somewhat brittle quality, and carrying with it the danger of overirritating the nerves at the point of pressure. Sarasate, the father of modern "conscientious" violin technique, dropped his fingers so lightly on the strings that no indentation on his finger-tips was noticeable.

The finger-nails should be kept trimmed so short that they do not touch the strings. The violinist must take the greatest care of his finger-tips. Callouses, in consequence of the lack of a soft fat-cushion, impair the tone quality in the highest degree, and too deep indentations are often followed by nervous irritation.'
Art of the Violin vol.1, Carl Flesch

By the early 1920s, Hoffman had become an internationally famous sculptor, and she and Grimson were married in 1924. Their roles then reversed, with him accompanying her on her research trips as manager and photographer, including to Asia in the early 1930s to prepare for her groundbreaking exhibition 'Races of Mankind' at Chicago's Field Museum. Although this made her a household name, the strain of travelling placed stress on their relationship. She later wrote:

Sam had many attacks of depression, and his doctors had insisted that he should live alone and try to find new fields of interest. His most desperate sadness still was being unable to play the violin. Such readjustment to life was a constant psychological battle. He seemed forced to withdraw into himself and for some time had felt unable to see any of our friends or live a normal life. He had plunged into study of science and optics, worked in a laboratory, and produced new and complex techniques in unexpected fields. For two years he stayed in a tiny apartment uptown. Finally he and his doctors decided our married life must end.

They divorced in 1936, and six years later, in a twist as if straight out of a melodrama, Grimson married Bettina Warburg (1900–90), a psychiatrist whom he and Hoffman had known since 1912, when she was still a child. Although not on his medical team per se, Warburg advised him on his issues and, as Ron Chernow noted in his 1993 book *The Warburgs: The 20th-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family*, 'When Bettina snatched Sam away from Malvina after an extended romance and married him in 1942, there was a noisy ruckus among the Warburgs, many of whom took Malvina's side.'

Despite his lingering PTSD and the dreams of playing the violin that haunted him to the end of his days, Grimson remained committed to collecting 18th-century Cremonese instruments and his professional life flourished: his company Grimson Color Inc. was notably very successful at incorporating colour in feature films. But his legacy as a musician should be remembered and celebrated – that of a fine soloist cut off in his prime whose ideas nonetheless pioneered modern violin pedagogy. ●

A RETURN TO HEAVEN

For the Takács Quartet, re-recording two of Schubert's string quartets, albeit with a new line-up, has been an eye-opening experience, as first violinist Edward Dusinberre and violist Richard O'Neill tell **Charlotte Gardner**

Both special circumstances and a special artist are needed for entry into the recording studio twice with the same major work, and that is precisely what we have in the case of the Takács Quartet and its latest album. The group pairs Schubert's late, great, 'heavenly length' String Quartet no.15 in G major D887 (which it previously recorded in 1996, for Decca) with his early- to middle-period String Quartet no.8 in B flat major D112 (which it first recorded back in 1982 for Hungaroton). In terms of circumstances, this is not the same set of players as on the earlier readings – only cellist András Fejér remains of the original line-up that recorded D112; and while today's first violinist Edward Dusinberre (*above right)* played on the 1996 D887 recording, Harumi Rhodes replaced original second violinist Károly Schranz in 2018, and violist Richard O'Neill (*above left*) joined as recently as 2020 (Roger Tapping having left as long ago as 2005).

The constant over the decades, meanwhile, has been this much-loved quartet's affinity for Schubert. In fact, it was with Schubert's D804 'Rosamunde' Quartet and D810 'Death and the Maiden' that the Takács made its critically acclaimed Hyperion debut in 2006. So as Dusinberre reached his 30th year in the quartet in 2023, a revisiting of the monumental G major felt apt. 'It's an incredibly daunting, all-encompassing piece, and actually so tough on stamina that we hadn't played it for a while,' he explains over video call from Boulder, Colorado, where the Takács is quartet-in-residence at the university. 'I just loved the idea of recording it again now – with Harumi's and Richard's fresh perspectives.'

'MY GREAT GIFT WHEN I JOINED THE TAKÁCS WAS SIX CRATES OF PARTS FROM ALL ITS PREVIOUS VIOLA PLAYERS' – *RICHARD O'NEILL, VIOLA*

Yet the quartet's heritage is also strongly present – something O'Neill, also on the call, is keen to highlight. 'My great gift when I joined the Takács was six crates of parts from all its previous viola players,' he says. 'Every one of them left something very beautiful that I could use on this recording, including the original violist Gábor Ormai for D112. For the G major, though, I used dear Roger Tapping's part exclusively. I never really got to work with Roger, but I sense that he spent a lot of time figuring out just the right, often very unconventional fingering, which I deeply appreciate.'

Sessions took place in the UK at Monmouthshire's Wyastone Concert Hall, the quartet's long-favoured recording venue for its lack of distractions and the bonding experience offered by evenings spent together in a nearby historic hotel. In the context of nature-loving Schubert, its remote Wye Valley setting now proved especially helpful, particularly with the G major Quartet, which they recorded first. 'We were really trying to bring out its dual elements,' says Dusinberre. 'On the one hand, there's its tremendous sense of terror, drama and extremity, which is perhaps easier to capture with the microphone so close, because you can really push to the limits of sound and create something quite symphonic. On the other hand, there's the sense of heavenly vision and release from the human body for a man who knew he was very ill; and somehow, coming out of the studio and looking across the river was very inspiring for us.' Dusinberre's previous recording experience with the work also proved valuable – his insight into its pitfalls, such as the structuring of that 21-minute first movement. 'He asked a lot of the right questions in advance, to prepare us,' observes O'Neill.

Another help was the quartet's habitual way of structuring recording days: that is, following the morning session with a

AMANDA TIPTON

prolonged break until 3.30pm or 4pm. 'Our producer, Andrew Keener, says he doesn't know anyone else who does this,' admits Dusinberre, 'but for me and András – the older guys! – it works so well. I actually have a nap and sleep really deeply.' Also, never underestimate the power of sugar. 'You wouldn't believe you could feel so affectionate about a little petrol station by the edge of the A40!' he laughs. 'But on the route from our hotel to the session, we always stop at the same one to buy flapjacks – for when you're two or three hours in, and wondering if you can still play in tune, or if your brain is still functioning at all. *That*'s the important thing about a session: how to keep up morale and pace yourself, because sometimes you get some of the best material right at the end, when you are quite tired. Because your adrenalin is more settled, you might just throw in a particular way of doing a phrase.'

As often happens when they're recording, the players tweaked certain tempos – because contrary to what can happen in live performance, the musicians were not having to accommodate to a room's size and acoustic. With the G major Quartet, there was a particular degree of fine-tuning required for the slow movement, where the cello plays a viscerally beautiful melody to an accompaniment that appears to demand both a sense of ongoing, wearily walking tread, and one of momentum. Initially, they felt they were too slow. Then things sounded too impatient. Then they remembered that O'Neill had performed in Schubert's song-cycle *Winterreise*, and wondered whether its narrator's desolate snowy trudge on foot away from the house where his love has been rejected might contain clues. And when O'Neill went to his score he found some. The first song, 'Gute Nacht' (Good Night), in which the figure sets out into the night, offered clues; as did 'Einsamkeit' (Loneliness), which starts on the same note, B, as the quartet's movement. 'The parallels definitely helped us find that sense of long-lined inevitability,' says O'Neill.

Recording D112 turned out to be unexpectedly profound. 'I think I'd been a little bit condescending about it in the past,' confesses Dusinberre, 'but when I went back to it, I realised that all of that unease and sense of drama that you see in the later quartet is there in this one too.' At which point, their decision to record it after the G major proved its worth. 'I think otherwise we would have had at the back of our mind that we still had to do D887,' he says. 'But instead there was a sense of taking a deep breath. We didn't treat the B flat major like a lesser piece. It got our full focus.' Which it required, turning out to be simply a different mountain to scale. 'Again, the slow movement is quite extraordinary,' enthuses O'Neill. 'It took us some time to capture the gravity of it, and there are similar tempo challenges to that of the G major; again there's a sense of something ominous, but still somehow moving forwards. In the middle section, the two violins did some really amazing *pas de deux*. The way Harumi and Edward were able to meld their passings of lines was gorgeous.'

Both quartets present some pretty hair-raising passages for the first violinist, and Dusinberre now brings up D112's last movement. 'The first violin has a lot of finickety passagework, while the other three have this beautiful chorale-like melody. I was a little too obsessed with it; but in the session, I realised I could afford to come in and out of their sound more, to play with a lighter touch – which was quite liberating. It genuinely felt more like recording a Haydn quartet, after all the drama and muscularity of the G major.'

The Takács Quartet (*l–r*) Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes, András Fejér and Richard O'Neill

When I ask them for their overall thoughts on and hopes for the finished readings, O'Neill responds instantly. 'I don't know of another composer who can take you to heaven and back in such little time,' he marvels, 'and I feel like this recording has all those elements. I'm very proud of the way the G major turned out, and I have to say that András's music making in the second movement, and the trio of the third, is really profound – it's a privilege to sit next to him, and now to hear his playing on the recording.'

Dusinberre's answer is equally full of love both for his colleagues and for Schubert. 'It's a conscious celebration of the quartet in this formation,' he says. 'There was a tremendous sense of energy and joyfulness in the process, and I hope that will come across.'

WORKS **Schubert** String Quartets: no.8 in B flat major D112, no.15 in G major D887
ARTIST **Takács Quartet**
RECORDING VENUE **Concert Hall, Wyastone Estate, Monmouth, UK**
RECORDING DATES **20–23 May 2023**
CATALOGUE NUMBER **Hyperion CDA 68423**
RELEASE DATE **7 June 2024**

OWEN ZHOU

BASS-BAR EXPERIMENTS

RAISING THE BAR

Joseph Curtin reports on a series of experiments at the 2023 Oberlin Acoustics Workshop, which attempted to ascertain the acoustic effects of altering the height and scoop of the violin's bass-bar

The bass-bar is a gracefully scooped beam of spruce running along the inside of the violin top, extending almost end to end and passing directly beneath the bass foot of the bridge. One of its functions is to prevent the top from collapsing under the sustained downward force of the strings. Another is to provide the structural asymmetry that is crucial to sound production. A stiff bar would best serve the supportive function – and the stiffer the better. What best serves the acoustics of the instrument is more complicated and involves the mass of the bar – typically between 3.5 and 4.5 grams – as well as the distribution of stiffness along its length. The trade-offs between what might be called the bass-bar's 'static' and 'dynamic' functions have tacitly governed the bar's evolution from its diminutive Baroque form to the longer, stiffer bars we use now.

On a sunny afternoon at the beginning of June 2023, violin makers and researchers from as far away as Japan and Australia and as near as Ann Arbor, Michigan, arrived in Oberlin, Ohio, a mid-Western college town that for a few weeks every summer becomes the centre of the violin making world. Last summer marked the first post-pandemic meeting of the Acoustics Workshop. A major part of the week was devoted to two experiments aimed at better understanding the violin bass-bar. The first investigated the acoustical effects of incrementally

PHOTOS OBERLIN ACOUSTICS WORKSHOP

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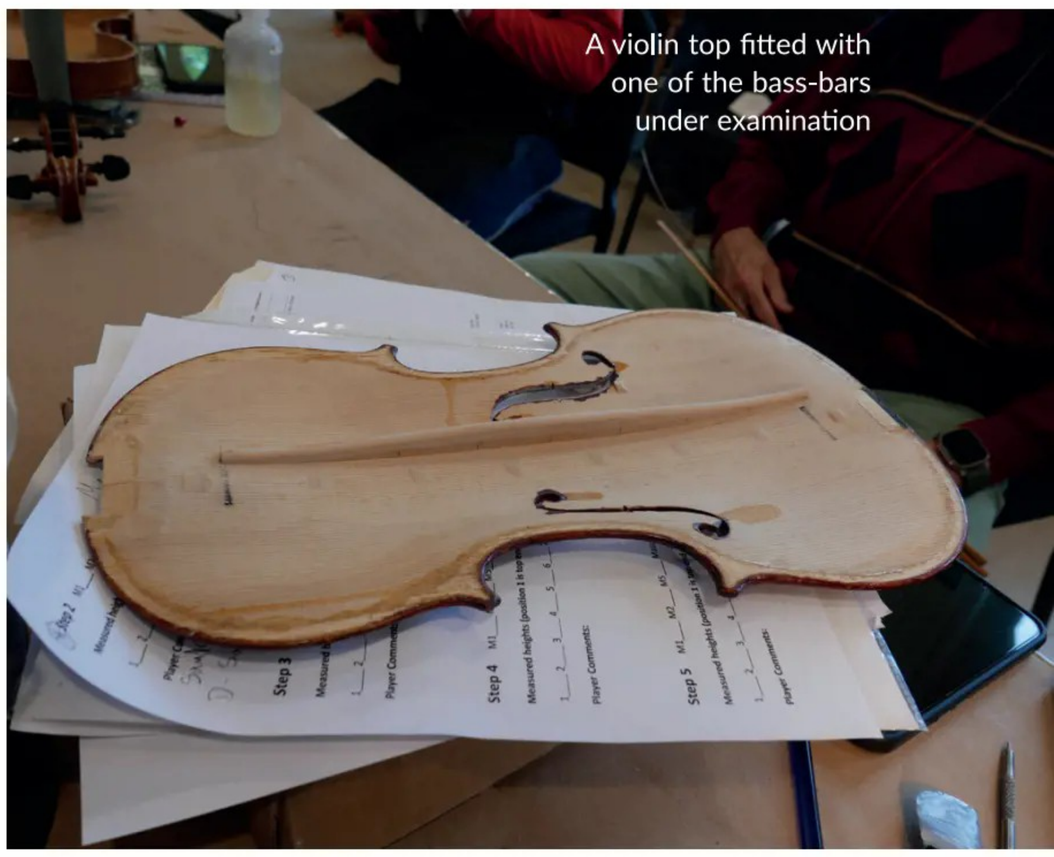
Luthiers making preparations for the bass-bar experiments at the 2023 Oberlin Acoustics Workshop

reducing its overall height, and the second the effects of incrementally increasing its scoop. Each experiment had its own set of instruments and its own team of makers. Dorian Barnes, Alex Currin, Johann Lotter, Wataru Shinozaki and Sibylle Ruppert participated in the height experiment, while Jason Starkie, Gaian Amorim, Todd Mathus and Steve McCann worked on scoop.

Each maker brought a violin with a specially prepared bar. In fitting it, they were asked to:

- record the density of the wood used
- maintain a thickness of 5.5mm along the entire length
- position the bar as they normally would
- fit the bar without 'spring' (i.e. without forcing a little extra arch into the top, as is often done)
- match the heights to those indicated in Step 1 of the experiment
- keep the side walls of the bar parallel, then round the top to a semicircle of 5.5mm diameter (this being easier to specify and control than the more typical elliptical cross-sections)
- glue the top as lightly as possible (for ease of removal)
- otherwise set up the instrument as they normally would

Brooklyn-based maker M.J. Kwan drew up designs for the modifications each bass-bar would undergo. The five-step height experiment (see **Figure 1**, page 48) began with an unusually high bar: 14mm at the geometrical centre and 4.5mm at the ends. It finished with an unusually low one: 7.3mm going down to 2.3mm. (None of the measurements given here include the thickness of the top.) The scoop experiment took the centre- and end-heights from Step 2 of the height experiment and kept these constant while the lengths in between were progressively scooped out. For the fifth and final step, the ends of the bar were taken down to zero ▹



A violin top fitted with one of the bass-bars under examination

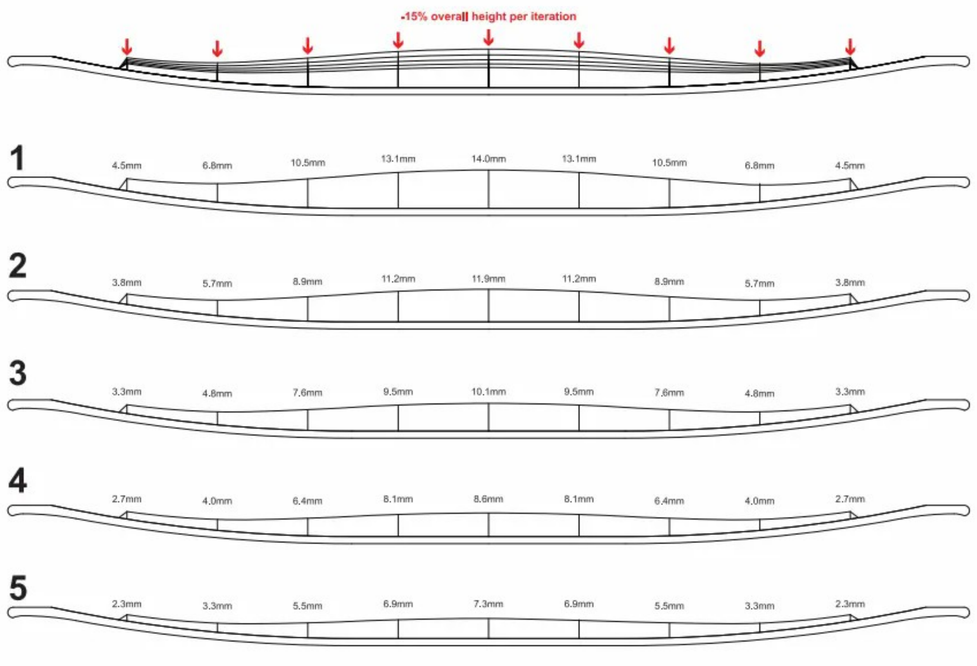


FIGURE 1 At each of the steps in the experiment, the heights at five positions along the bar were reduced by 15 per cent. The rest of the bar was then trimmed to a smooth longitudinal profile.

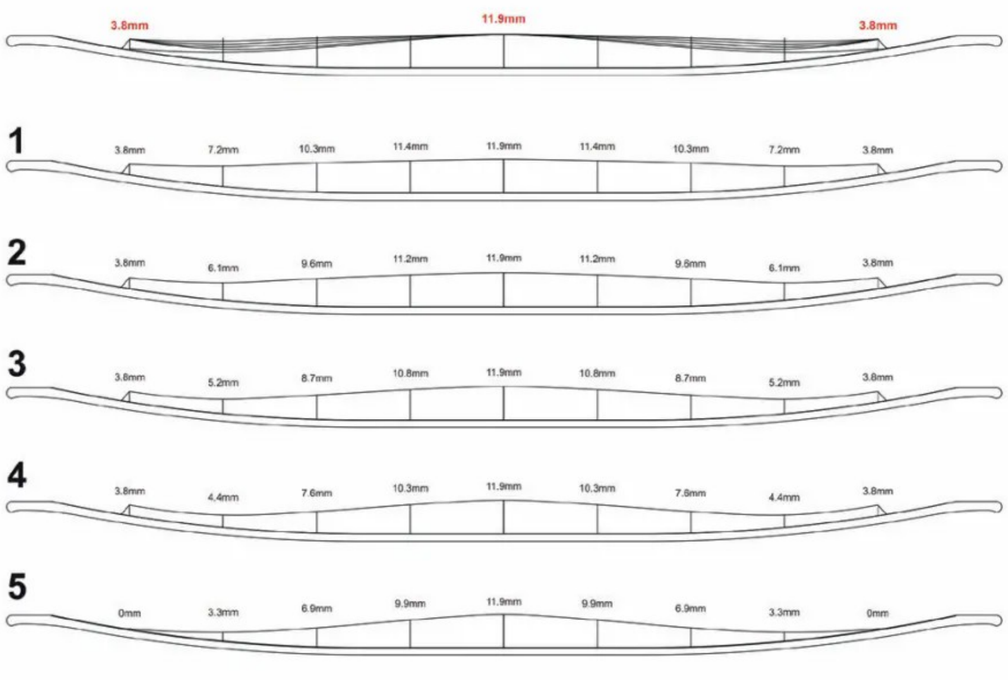


FIGURE 2 In the scoop experiment, makers controlled the heights at nine measurement points as they progressively increased the scoop. The last step tests the effects of removing wood at the ends of the bar.

while leaving the centre height the same. **Figure 2** shows the five steps used in the experiment.

The workshop was six days long, meaning that every day each maker had to remove the top, trim the bar, re-glue the top, and string up the instrument in time for acoustic measurements the following morning. There were, of course, setbacks – an unglued seam here, a measurement malfunction there – and yet heroic efforts by the assembled makers and measurers produced a full data set for eight of the nine instruments.

Two players, Alex Malaimare and Sean Hardesty, informally evaluated the instruments at every step. There was no time for rigorous subjective testing, however, so we relied on acoustical measurements to track changes in the instruments. **Figure 3** shows Lonny Marino using an impulse hammer and laser vibrometer to measure bridge admittance, which shows how much energy from the bowed string gets into the instrument. In **Figure 4** M.J. Kwan measures radiativity, or how much sound is radiated across the frequency range for a given force at the bridge. In this article we will consider only the sound radiation data.

A standard method for measuring sound radiation is to tap the bridge with a tiny hammer equipped with a force sensor, and then record the response with a microphone. To get a representative sampling of the violin's complex sound field, we did this at twelve positions around the instrument, tapping the bass corner of the bridge horizontally and then repeating the cycle tapping the top centre of the bridge vertically. An average of these 24 measurements provides an estimate of the total sound output for a given force. In this article, general trends are highlighted by averaging the measurements of all four violins at each step. The jagged lines in the graphs have been smoothed somewhat for clarity. The horizontal lines represent the average sound levels in each band. Where sound engineers typically work with 1/3 octave

ALL PHOTOS OBERLIN ACOUSTICS WORKSHOP. FIGURES COURTESY JOSEPH CURTIN

FIGURE 3 Luthier Lonny Marino measures bridge admittance using an impulse hammer and laser vibrometer

FIGURE 4 M.J. Kwan (*second left*) measures radiativity, or how much sound is radiated across the frequency range for a given force at the bridge

FIGURE 5 Unlike a recording engineer adjusting the spectral balance with a few sliders, luthiers have a vast number of variables they can adjust, with results that can be unpredictable

bands, the four much-broader bands used here correspond with natural subdivisions in the spectrum of any normally built violin.

To date, there are no well-tested correlations between a violin's perceived playing qualities and *any* acoustical measurement, making it reasonable to ask: why bother with more measurements? One answer is that the inner workings of the violin are interesting to makers for the same reason that those of a combustion engine are interesting to automobile manufacturers, regardless of the preferences of any particular drivers or players. The more deeply that makers understand the instrument at a physical level, the better they can cater to the wildly varying tastes of individual players.

Recording engineers can tweak the spectral balance of a sound using the sliders on an equaliser, each of which independently adjusts the sound level in one particular frequency band (**figure 5**). Makers do something similar when making an instrument, though without the benefit of sliders. Or one could say there are a great many sliders, but they are linked to each other in ways no one really understands, making it difficult to predict the result of shifting any given one. Although makers can easily control the height of the arching or the length of the f-holes or the position of the soundpost, they can at best make intelligent guesses as to the tonal outcome.

One promise of scientific research is to tease out the interconnections, allowing the guesses to become more intelligent. For example, research has shown the strong influence of the mass and tuning of the violin bridge on the instrument's high-frequency output, allowing a good deal more control than was previously available. There has been no such research on the bass-bar. Common wisdom is that raising the height will increase brilliance and projection, while lowering it will darken the sound. How does this hold up, experimentally?

The graphs in this article show sound output across a frequency range of 200–7,000Hz. The horizontal lines indicate band averages – i.e. the average level for all the peaks and valleys in a particular frequency band. The bands used here are delineated by the following frequencies: 200Hz–780Hz–1,740Hz–2,930Hz–7,000Hz. All graphs except that in figure 9 represent the average output for all violins in the experiment. The levels of each can be thought of as the relative positions of a slider on an equaliser. Now let's see how these positions change with each step of the height experiment. ▷

ALTHOUGH MAKERS CAN EASILY CONTROL THE HEIGHT OF THE ARCHING OR LENGTH OF THE F-HOLES, THEY CAN AT BEST MAKE INTELLIGENT GUESSES AS TO THE TONAL OUTCOME

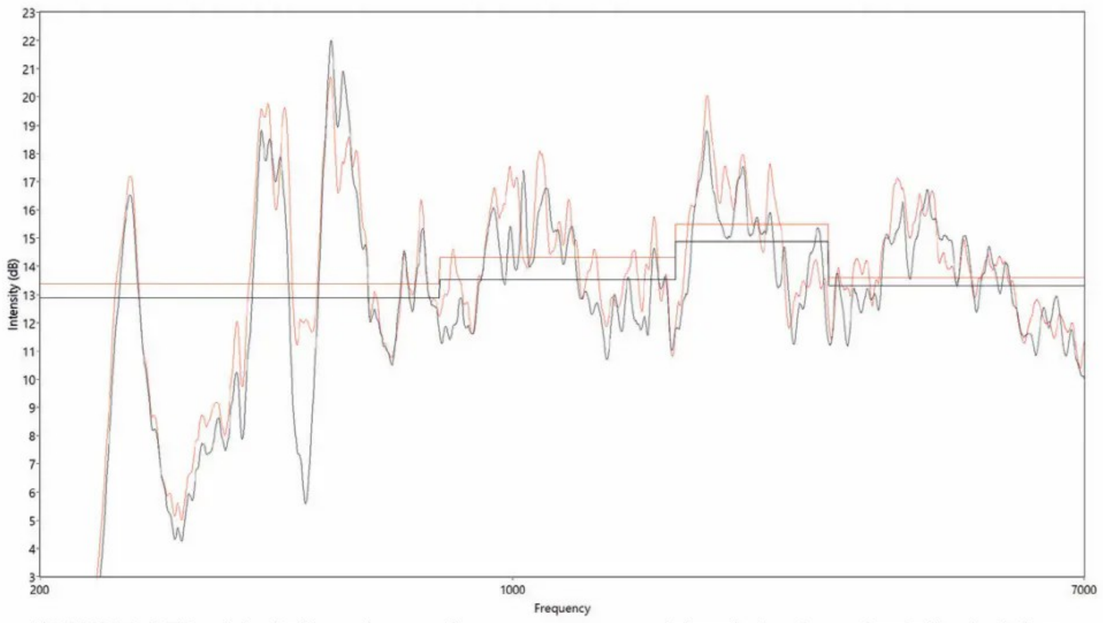


FIGURE 6 The black line shows the average sound levels in Step 1 of the height experiment. The red line shows Step 2. Levels have gone up in all four bands.

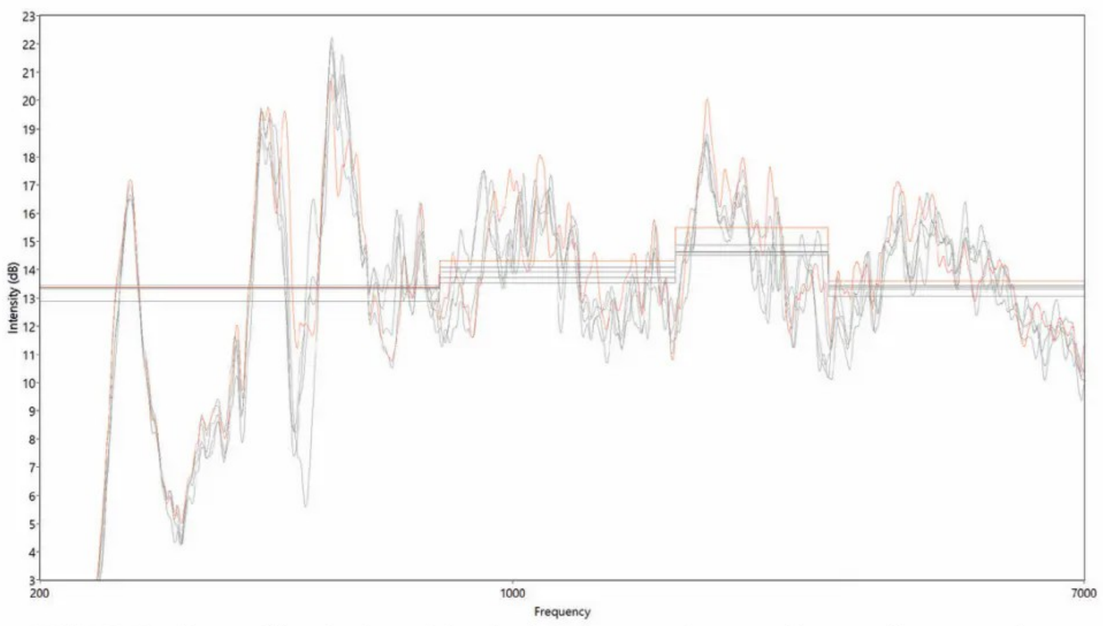


FIGURE 7 The red line is Step 2 in the height experiment. The grey lines are the other steps. Step 2 has higher levels in the top three bands, and second highest in the other.

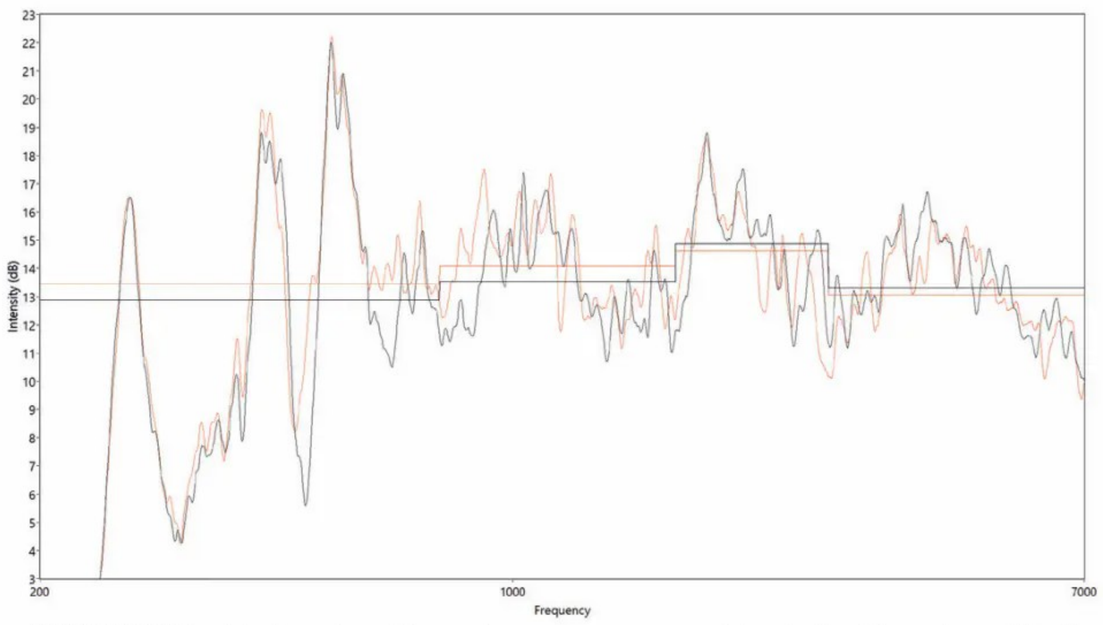


FIGURE 8 The black and red lines show average sound levels for Steps 1 and 5 of the height experiment, respectively. In Step 5, the spectral balance is shifted towards the bass.

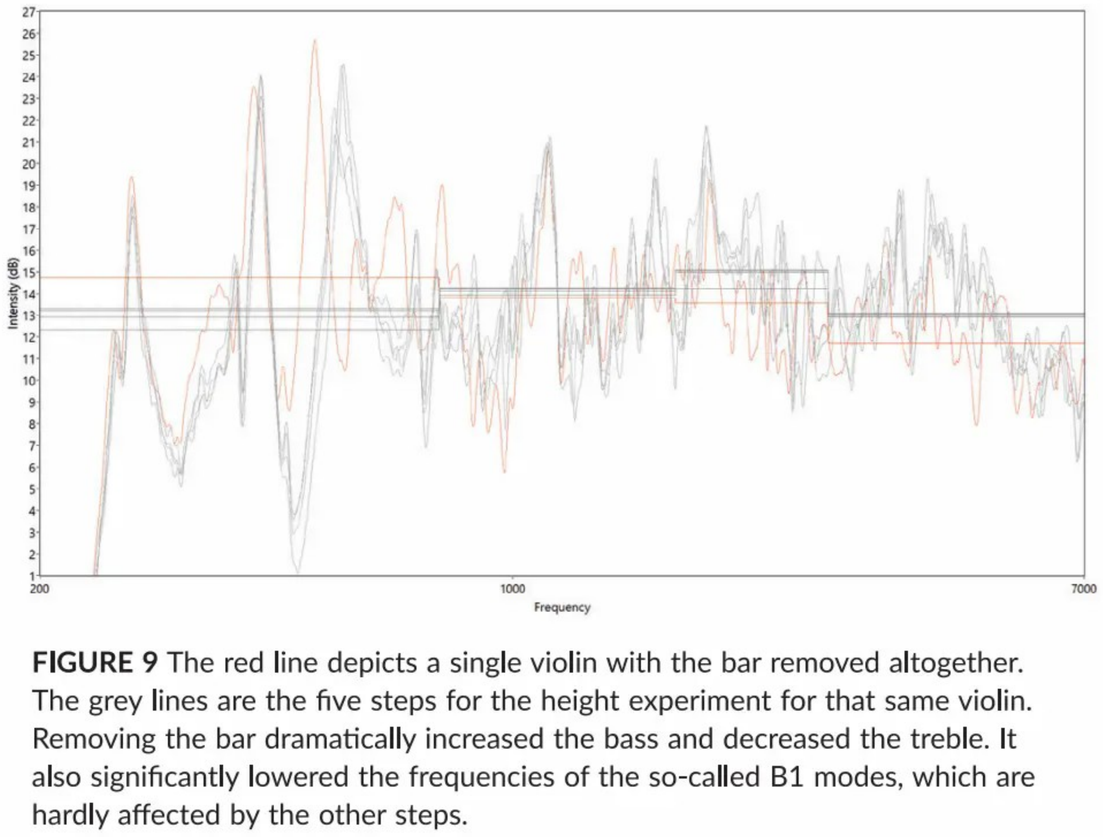


FIGURE 9 The red line depicts a single violin with the bar removed altogether. The grey lines are the five steps for the height experiment for that same violin. Removing the bar dramatically increased the bass and decreased the treble. It also significantly lowered the frequencies of the so-called B1 modes, which are hardly affected by the other steps.

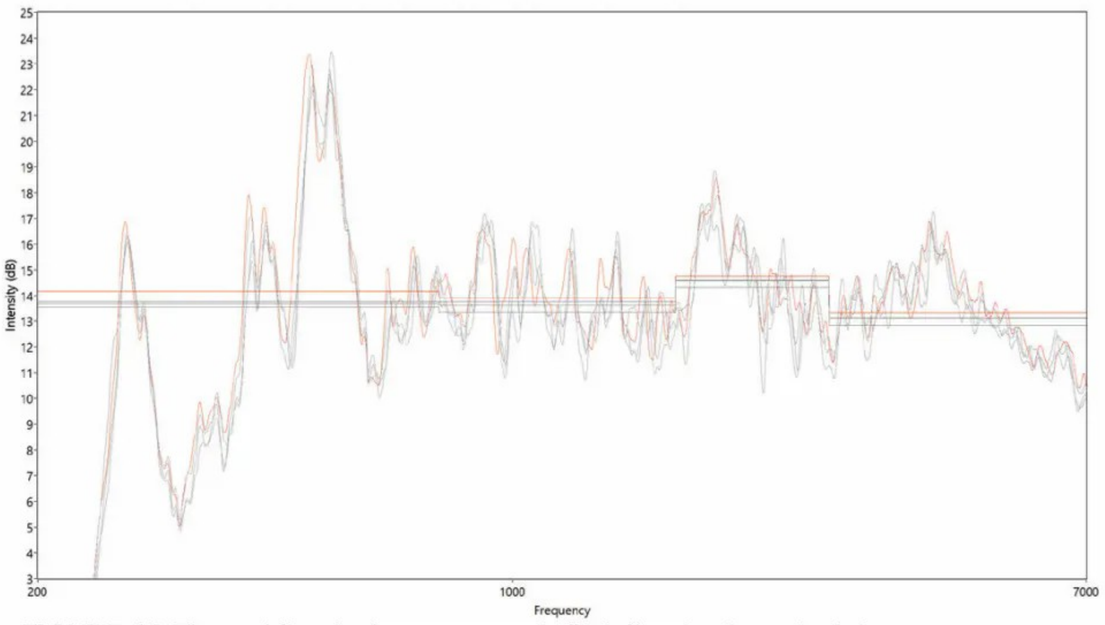


FIGURE 10 The red line is the average of all violins for Step 4 of the scoop experiment. It shows slightly more sound output in all bands than the four other steps (gray lines)

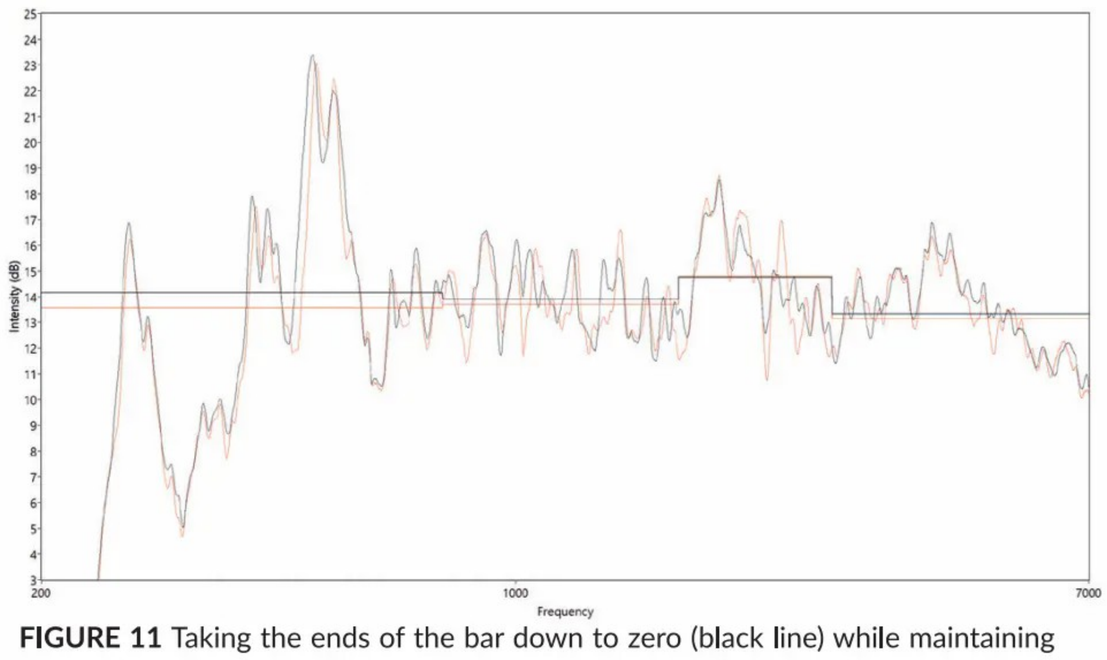


FIGURE 11 Taking the ends of the bar down to zero (black line) while maintaining full height at the centre reduced output in Bands 1, 2 and 4. The band level was unchanged in Band 3, and yet the height of two peaks there actually went up.

Because there were countless uncontrolled variables and opportunities for experimental error, results should be considered suggestive rather than definitive. Still, it can be seen in **figure 6** that the average sound output of all four violins in the height experiment went up in all four frequency bands. This was true of each violin individually: sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically.

Figure 7 overlays Step 2 (in red) over all other steps (in grey). Step 2 produces the highest output in the three top bands, and very nearly the highest in the lowest band. If one wants to maximise overall sound output, Step 2 seems a clear winner.

Figure 8 compares all violins at Step 1 and Step 5. The spectral balance has clearly shifted towards the bass, confirming the common wisdom that lowering the bar tends to reduce brightness. One maker, Johann Lotter, went a step further and removed the bar altogether. **Figure 9** shows that this moved the balance far more dramatically. It also significantly lowered the frequencies of the so-called B1 modes, which were hardly affected by the other steps. The term 'bass-bar' may be misleading in that its very existence inhibits bass output while increasing treble.

The results from the scoop experiment are less obvious, as there was a great deal of variation among instruments from step to step. And yet **Figure 10** shows that on average (and only on average) Step 4 provided the highest sound output in all bands.

FIGURE 12 Step 2 from the height experiment and Step 4 from the scoop. Each produced, on average, the highest levels in all frequency bands, albeit in different sets of instruments

FIGURES COURTESY JOSEPH CURTIN. PHOTO COURTESY OBERLIN ACOUSTICS WORKSHOP

Step 5 of the scoop experiment changed the question to what happens if you take the end of the bar down to zero while maintaining the height at the centre. **Figure 11** shows that sound levels go down in Bands 1, 2 and 4, while Band 3 holds steady. Moreover, the height of two prominent peaks in Band 3 goes up – a tantalising finding given the tonal importance of this band, which covers the so-called Bridge Hill region.

What should makers take home from all this? **Figure 12** shows Steps 2 and 4 for the height and scoop experiments respectively. When averaged over the four instruments in each experiment, these steps produced the highest sound levels in all frequency bands. While Step 2 of the height experiment will look like a typical bass-bar to many makers, Step 4 may seem more scooped than usual. Though the data for this experiment is relatively weak, statistically it does suggest a direction makers may want to explore.

Should we conclude that relatively high bars with a fair bit of scoop are optimal? Well, no – at least not without a well-grounded definition of optimal, and this surely varies from one instrument (and one player) to the next. A previous article on the bridge's evolution ('Views on the bridge', *The Strad*, November 2019) suggested that the modern bridge was adopted because it increased sound output, especially at frequencies associated with brilliance and projection. This experiment implies that the modern bar, which is higher and longer than its Baroque counterpart, was adopted for the same reason. Players want to be heard.

More research would be helpful. One of the most promising ways forward is to use computer models of instruments. Although modelling the violin's geometry and material properties is a complex and challenging project, once done, numerous experiments can be undertaken without the punishing time investment and uncontrollable variables associated with modifying real instruments. Qualified volunteers please apply! ●

SERGE KOUSSEVITZKY

AN *ENDURING* LEGACY

Serge Koussevitzky pictured around 1930

July 2024 marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Serge Koussevitzky – the Russian-born double bass virtuoso turned music director, educator and mentor. Fellow double bassist and conductor **Leon Bosch** examines his hugely influential life

Serge Koussevitzky was an enigma. His status as a double bass soloist equalled that of his illustrious predecessors Domenico Dragonetti (1763–1846) and Giovanni Bottesini (1821–89). He was also a conductor who commanded the same reverence accorded to Toscanini and Stokowski, a passionate advocate for new music, an esteemed publisher, and a dedicated educator of and mentor to a generation of musicians.

But he also had his detractors. Orchestral musicians, especially those of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, feared and resented his autocratic hiring and firing of musicians; some doubted the integrity of his musical education and his suitability therefore as music director; and he was notoriously also often at loggerheads with music critics.

The occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth provides a convenient opportunity for evaluating his legacy and perhaps coming to a greater understanding of the man himself.

STUDENT PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

EARLY YEARS

Koussevitzky was born into a musical family in the small town of Vishny-Volochok, approximately 180 miles north-west of Moscow, on 26 July 1874. His father, Alexander Koussevitzky, was a violinist and his mother, Anna Barabeitchik, a pianist. The young Sergey Alexandrovich was a musical child, and learnt to play a number of instruments, including the violin, trumpet and tuba, but with the cello as his primary focus at that time.

At the age of 17, Koussevitzky set off for Moscow to further his musical education. He failed to secure a place at the Moscow Imperial Conservatory, on account of presenting himself too late after the start of term, but he cajoled his way

As a 15-year-old student

into the school of the Moscow Philharmonic Society, where the only available scholarships were for trombonist, piccolo player and double bassist. He chose the double bass and made rapid progress under the guidance of his teacher Josef Ramboušek, principal double bassist of the Bolshoi Theatre and professor of double bass at the school of the Moscow Philharmonic Society from 1882 until his death in 1901.

Koussevitzky practised demonically, much to the annoyance of his roommates, who found him a barnlike loft space where he could practise endlessly without disturbing anyone. His efforts were richly rewarded, however. In 1892, one year after entering the Philharmonic Society school, he was presented to Tchaikovsky as a double bass virtuoso, performing Ramboušek's arrangement of the Andante cantabile from Tchaikovsky's First String Quartet with the composer himself at the piano. And in October 1894, Koussevitzky became a member of the Bolshoi Theatre orchestra in Moscow.

THE DOUBLE BASS VIRTUOSO

Koussevitzky's ambitions, however, exceeded a rank-and-file orchestral position. Despite moving up to the first desk in double-quick time, he worked with ever greater zeal, attaining an exceptional virtuosity that would have a stupefying effect upon everyone who heard him. His playing was by all accounts 'refined, exquisite and expressive', according to Moses Smith in his 1947 book *Koussevitzky*.

He became a popular recitalist not only in Moscow and St Petersburg but also throughout Russia, and made his first solo appearance in Berlin in 1898. Because of the relative paucity of available repertoire, Koussevitzky made for himself a number of transcriptions of works including Eccles's Violin Sonata in G minor, Mozart's Bassoon Concerto, Bruch's *Kol nidrei*, Strauss's Cello Sonata and the first two of Scriabin's Five Preludes op.74. He also composed four salon pieces for double bass and piano: Andante op.1 no.1, *Valse miniature* op.1 no.2 (published as *Deux morceaux*), *Chanson triste* op.2 and Humoresque op.4 (all published c.1906–7).

Koussevitzky succeeded Ramboušek as professor of double bass in 1901 at the relatively tender age of 27, adding to his musical prestige, and in 1902 he composed his Double Bass Concerto in F sharp minor op.3. Its first performance, at a Moscow Philharmonic concert in February 1905, was enthusiastically received by the critic Ivan Liapev, who also commented on Koussevitzky's esteemed artistic status.

Koussevitzky featured in *The Strad* in July 1908

He was in demand as a soloist in many of the Moscow salons, and continued to give extensive recital tours throughout Europe and Scandinavia. Even once he had become a successful conductor, he never completely forsook the double bass. He performed in a number of charity concerts and is also rumoured to have given an impromptu performance of his *Valse miniature* after conducting a concert in Scotland.

In comparison with that of other double bass virtuosos and composers, Koussevitzky's output was relatively modest. Bottesini composed approximately three dozen solo compositions, and Josep Cervera-Bret (1883–1969) more than 60, but his Double Bass Concerto and the four salon pieces enjoy the distinction of being a central and indispensable part of solo double bass repertoire.

HISTORIC SOLO RECORDINGS

In 1928 and 1929, when in his mid-fifties, Koussevitzky made what is almost certainly the first ever commercially released recording for solo double bass, on the RCA label. He plays the second movement Andante from his Concerto, his *Chanson triste* and *Valse miniature*, Gustav Laska's *Wiegenlied*, the ▹

KOUSSEVITZKY CAJOLED HIS WAY INTO THE SCHOOL OF THE MOSCOW PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY, WHERE THE ONLY AVAILABLE SCHOLARSHIPS WERE FOR TROMBONE, PICCOLO AND DOUBLE BASS

Koussevitzky with his double bass

Largo from Eccles's Sonata in G minor and Beethoven's Minuet in G major (all with piano accompaniment). Koussevitzky's liberal use of portamento might seem a little dated by today's standards, but this historic recording (bit.ly/4aAVzmG) provides a valuable insight into the nature of his musicianship and instrumental virtuosity.

It wasn't until much later into the 20th century that other double bassists began to perform his music, however. The American bassist Gary Karr was at the forefront of the revival, and in 1969 with the financial assistance of the Koussevitzky Foundation, he recorded the first complete performance of Koussevitzky's Concerto with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Alfredo Antonini.

My own introduction to Koussevitzky was in 1981 when, as a student at the South African College of Music of the University of Cape Town, I learnt his four salon pieces for double bass and piano. They made a deep impression on me, and I also quickly learnt his luscious Concerto op.3. They have remained stalwarts of my repertoire ever since and I teach his compositions to all my students. As a double bass player, Koussevitzky has always been an inspiration to me, and as a conductor I find his indefatigable energy equally infectious.

I have absolutely no doubt that Koussevitzky will retain his place alongside Dragonetti and Bottesini as one of the most important figures in the history of the double bass, and that the impassioned sounds of his music for the instrument will continue to reverberate around the concert halls of the world.

WITH ACCESS TO BOTH A HUGE FORTUNE AND THE DEVOTED SUPPORT OF HIS NEW WIFE, HE WAS ABLE TO PURSUE HIS MUSICAL DREAMS FEARLESSLY

A REMARKABLE CHANGE IN FORTUNE

Koussevitzky may well have made an even bigger contribution to the art of string playing and the repertoire for the double bass had he remained merely an instrumentalist. However, it is his work as publisher, conductor, music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and tireless champion of new music that arguably remains unsurpassed.

His appearance as a soloist in a series of concerts at the Moscow mansion of Konstantin Ushkov, a wealthy tea merchant, was to prove the decisive turning point in Koussevitzky's life. In the audience was Ushkov's daughter, Natalya Konstantinova. Early in 1905 he and Natalya married – just a few months after he divorced his first wife of only three years, the ballerina Nadezhda Galat.

Natalya Ushkova Koussevitzky

This second marriage truly set him free. With access to both a huge fortune and the unconditional and devoted support of his new wife, he was able to pursue his musical dreams fearlessly.

The double bass alone was no longer enough. In 1905, while he and Natalya were living in Berlin, he set out to master a long-held ambition: the art of conducting. He hired a pianist to play through orchestral scores while he practised his gestures, reputedly to rows of empty chairs arranged in the pattern of a symphony orchestra. He then hired the services of an orchestra of students from the Berlin Hochschule, whom he rehearsed at will for nearly two years, working through a large core repertoire.

In 1908, when he deemed himself properly prepared, he engaged the Berlin Philharmonic for his debut. The all-Russian programme included Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Overture, Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto in C minor, with the composer as soloist, the Entr'acte to Taneyev's *Orestes* and Glière's Symphony in C minor. Both the Taneyev and Glière constituted European premieres. In a second concert approximately one month later, he conducted Beethoven's 'Egmont' Overture and Seventh Symphony, as if to emphasise his command of the standard classical repertoire.

Koussevitzky at the start of his conducting career

Reviews were favourable, as was comment from members of the orchestra. The German magazine *Die Signale* wrote 'Koussevitzky left no doubt that he is an interpreter of uncommon temperament and an ▹

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effective orchestral leader. He knows how to get elemental bursts of power from the orchestra as well as the sweetest and most ingratiating sounds, and with all his energy and all his temperament he keeps authoritative control.' The Berlin Philharmonic musicians were similarly impressed by his open-mindedness and his willingness both to learn and dictate.

Koussevitzky would however soon add a third strand to his career. He sought to establish a music publishing house modelled on the philanthropic venture of the impresario Mitrofan Belyayev who had, until his death in 1904, encouraged composers of the Russian Nationalist School. In 1909 he and his wife returned to Russia to establish the Éditions Russe de Musique. Its purpose was to publish works by Russian composers with Scriabin, Stravinsky, Taneyev and Medtner among the earliest beneficiaries.

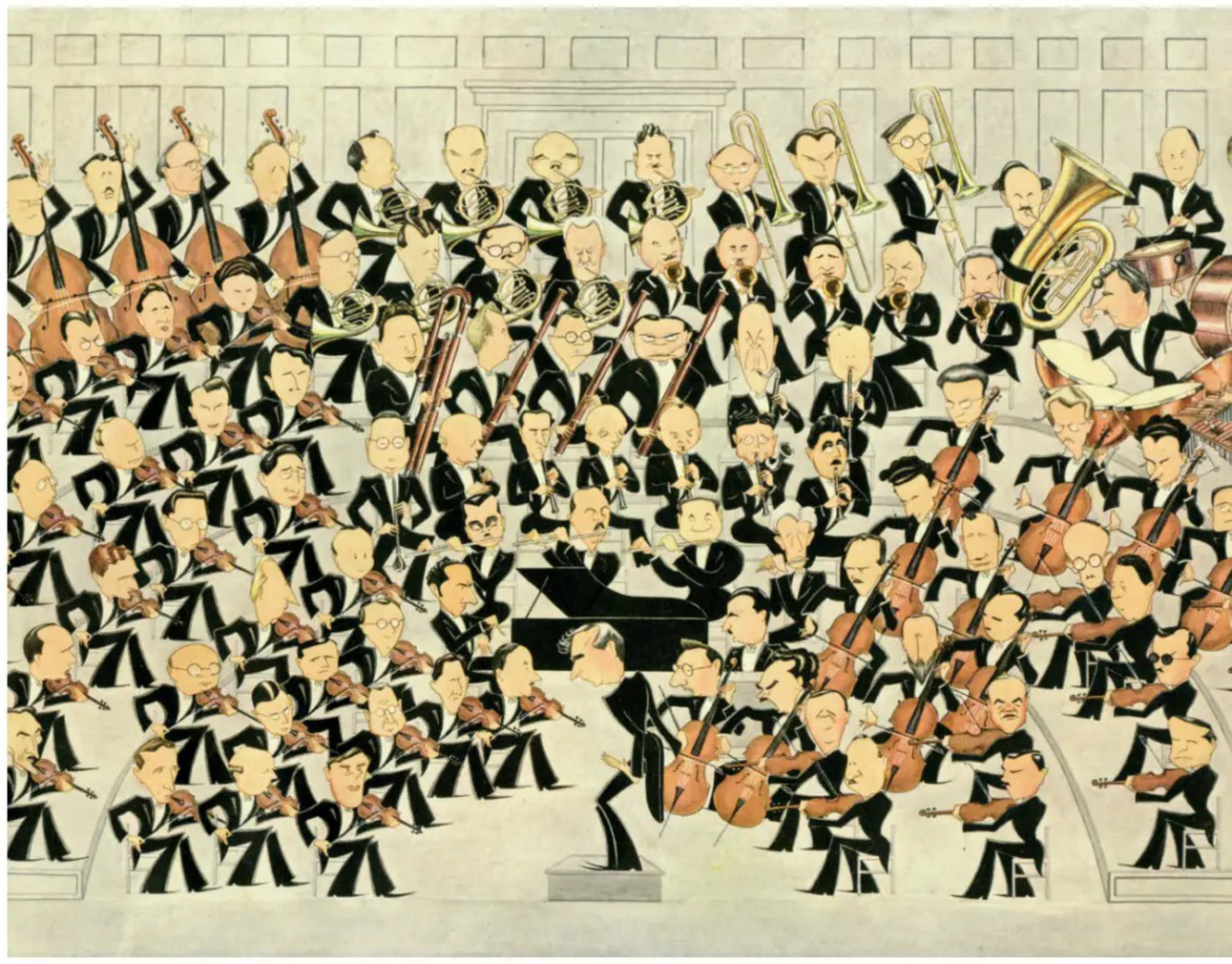
Over the next few years Koussevitzky judiciously deployed the fortune at his disposal to consolidate his reputation as a conductor of distinction, as well as a champion of new music. He promoted an annual series of concerts in Moscow and St Petersburg, initially performed by the orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre with him presiding over his former colleagues, and latterly with his own orchestra. He inaugurated orchestral cruises along the Volga River, designed to take symphonic music to new audiences. He commissioned and published the music of the most eminent Russian and European composers and championed celebrated soloists such as Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, Horowitz, Busoni, Schnabel, Godowsky, Auer, Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz. He invited eminent European artists such as Debussy to perform and conduct in Russia. He promoted the prestigious and fashionable Concerts Koussevitzky in Paris. And he generated many more conducting engagements throughout Europe and the United Kingdom, where he was regularly invited to conduct the London and BBC Symphony Orchestras.

Koussevitzky was undeterred by the intervention of World War I and the Russian Revolution. He continued all his musical activities, fuelled by a breathless and obsessive determination, laying the foundations for the next, even more prolific, chapter of his life.

THE BOSTON SYMPHONY YEARS

At the age of 50, in 1924, Koussevitzky was appointed the ninth conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the position that would become his most important and enduring musical relationship and that he would hold until his retirement in 1949.

The demands of music directorship proved more exacting than freelance life, with its attendant musical sovereignty, that Koussevitzky had until now enjoyed. Preparing a few dozen different programmes and conducting more than one hundred concerts in a 30-week season was an entirely new – and initially onerous – challenge.

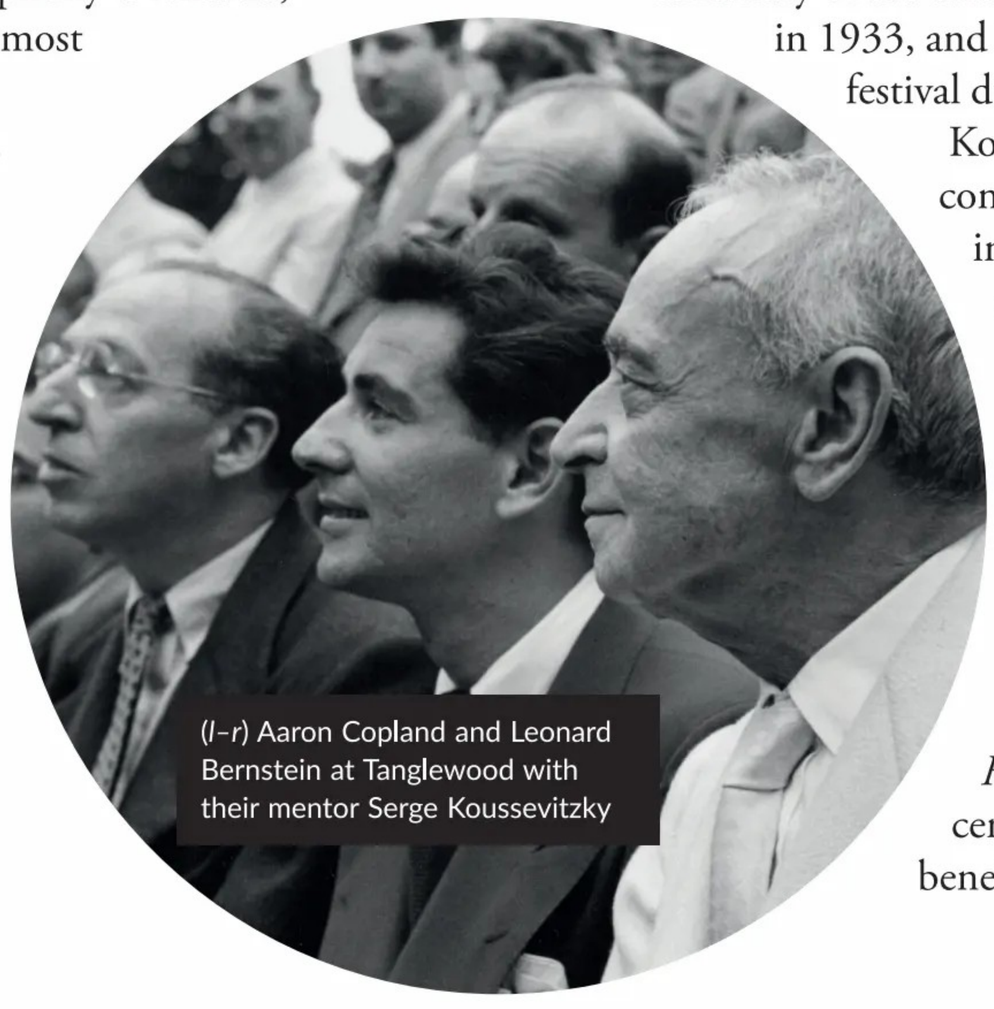
He quickly set about rebuilding the orchestra to match his vision,

Caricature of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky, 1936

mercilessly hiring and firing musicians – 17 were culled in his first season. He soon presided over an ensemble that the *New York Times* critic Olin Downes characterised as 'an orchestra that is without a superior if it has an equal in this country, a band that Mr Koussevitzky has brought to unique flexibility, sensitivity and virtuosity'.

Koussevitzky's programming at the Boston Symphony was always ambitious and enterprising, and it is difficult to think of any other music director or conductor with as prolific a track record of commissioning and promoting new music. This uncommon emphasis was a particular characteristic of Koussevitzky's programming, but he was also uniquely creative in the presentation of standard repertoire. He would often devote whole series of concerts to single composers, in the manner of mini festivals.

In 1927, for example, he programmed a Beethoven festival, including the complete cycle of symphonies, to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Beethoven's death. The centenary of the birth of Brahms was similarly observed in 1933, and he also presented a Tchaikovsky festival during the same 1933–34 season. Koussevitzky performed the first complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies in the US (1932–33). He was also offered the privilege of conducting the world premiere of Sibelius's Eighth Symphony, before it subsequently transpired that Sibelius had destroyed the score.

Koussevitzky related a story to friends about rehearsing one of Sibelius's new works, according to Moses Smith in his book *Koussevitzky*. Convinced that a certain part of the music would benefit from a different choice of tempo



(*l–r*) Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein at Tanglewood with their mentor Serge Koussevitzky

CARTOON COURTESY OF ROBERT RIPLEY/BSO. TANGLEWOOD PHOTO RUTH ORKIN. BSO ARCHIVES

but unwilling to disobey the composer's instructions, he cabled Sibelius in Finland. The reply came back, 'Play it as you feel it.' Koussevitzky's devotion to Sibelius's music was formally recognised in April 1931 when he received the Cross of the Finnish Order of the White Rose.

It would be difficult to overstate the enormous debt of gratitude the musical world owes to Koussevitzky for his patronage of so many composers, and the resulting musical masterpieces that now form a treasured part of the classical canon. Ravel's iconic orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* are two of Koussevitzky's best-known commissions, but there are many more: Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto, Barber's violin and cello concertos and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* are just a few.

Koussevitzky exercised a zealous commitment to promoting American music, and he loyally encouraged young and developing talent. Aaron Copland is but one example of a young composer who benefited from Koussevitzky's generosity. Even though the first performance of 24-year-old Copland's *Symphony for Orchestra and Organ* (later reworked as the First Symphony) had a lukewarm reception. Koussevitzky's faith in the young composer did not waver, and he commissioned Copland to write another work for a League of Composers event. The result was *Music for the Theatre*, arguably one of Copland's finest compositions.

Koussevitzky presented more than 150 compositions by American composers during his tenure at Boston and, at a time when recording was still an expensive pursuit, he methodically set about accumulating an unprecedentedly large discography, much of it still available. These efforts did not go unnoticed and in addition to being granted American citizenship in 1941, he received a string of honorary degrees and awards including doctorates from Brown University in 1926 and Harvard in 1928. He used his title, Dr Koussevitzky, with pride.

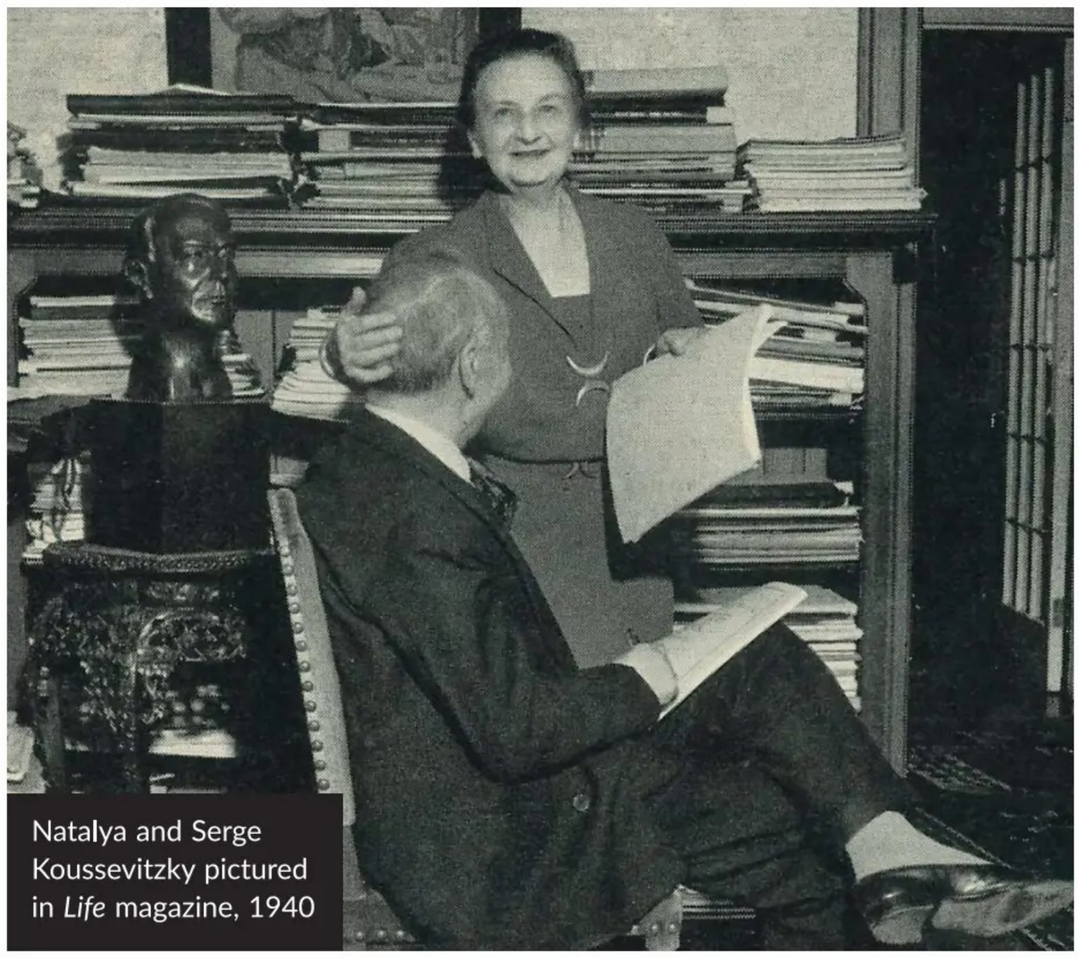
A TRIBUTE TO NATALYA

When Koussevitzky's wife Natalya died in 1942, he created the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in her honour, with the aim of assisting composers by commissioning new compositions and underwriting the cost of their performances.

Benjamin Britten was one of the earliest beneficiaries of the foundation, which commissioned his opera *Peter Grimes*. Other important works enabled by the foundation include Messiaen's *Turangalîla Symphonie*, Milhaud's Second Symphony, Stravinsky's *Ode* and Copland's Third Symphony.

The Berkshire (now Tanglewood) Music Center, alongside the Tanglewood Festival, was central to Koussevitzky's vision as an educator; he believed that 'so long as culture and art exist, there is hope for humanity.' He was director of the Berkshire Centre and taught conducting as well as giving lectures and leading the student orchestra. In 1940, the centre's first year of operation, it received 600 applications. Hindemith and Copland taught composition, Herbert Graf gave classes in operatic interpretation, Olin Downes lectured on musical history, and members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave instrumental lessons.

Students took turns conducting, with two pianists playing reductions of the orchestral scores. They were surrounded by mirrors, to see themselves as others might see them, and a ballet



Natalya and Serge Koussevitzky pictured in *Life* magazine, 1940

BERNSTEIN REVEALED THAT KOUSSEVITZKY IMPARTED TO HIM THE FEELING OF PLAYING THE ORCHESTRA AS ONE PLAYS AN INSTRUMENT

master was also engaged to teach students how to be elegant on the podium. The system of score reading and study that Koussevitzky had designed for himself, one born out of necessity, and the very same that he employed in his conducting classes has endured to this day.

Leonard Bernstein, Koussevitzky's most illustrious protégé, revealed that he owed everything to him and that it was Koussevitzky who imparted to him the feeling of playing the orchestra as one plays an instrument. Musicians who performed under Bernstein suggest that he had absorbed the gestures, mannerisms and spirit of Koussevitzky's conducting.

In 1947 he became the first BSO conductor to be given the title Music Director. The same year, he married his late wife's niece Olga Naumova (*right*), who had initially been hired as his secretary. Olga continued to promote Koussevitzky's legacy after his death in Boston in 1951.

Although Koussevitzky enjoyed a brilliant career as a double bass virtuoso, publisher and patron of composers, it is as a conductor that he will be best remembered. His legacy lives on through the numerous recordings he made, the countless works he commissioned, the composers he championed, the musicians he mentored, and the continued pioneering work of his Koussevitzky Foundation. ●

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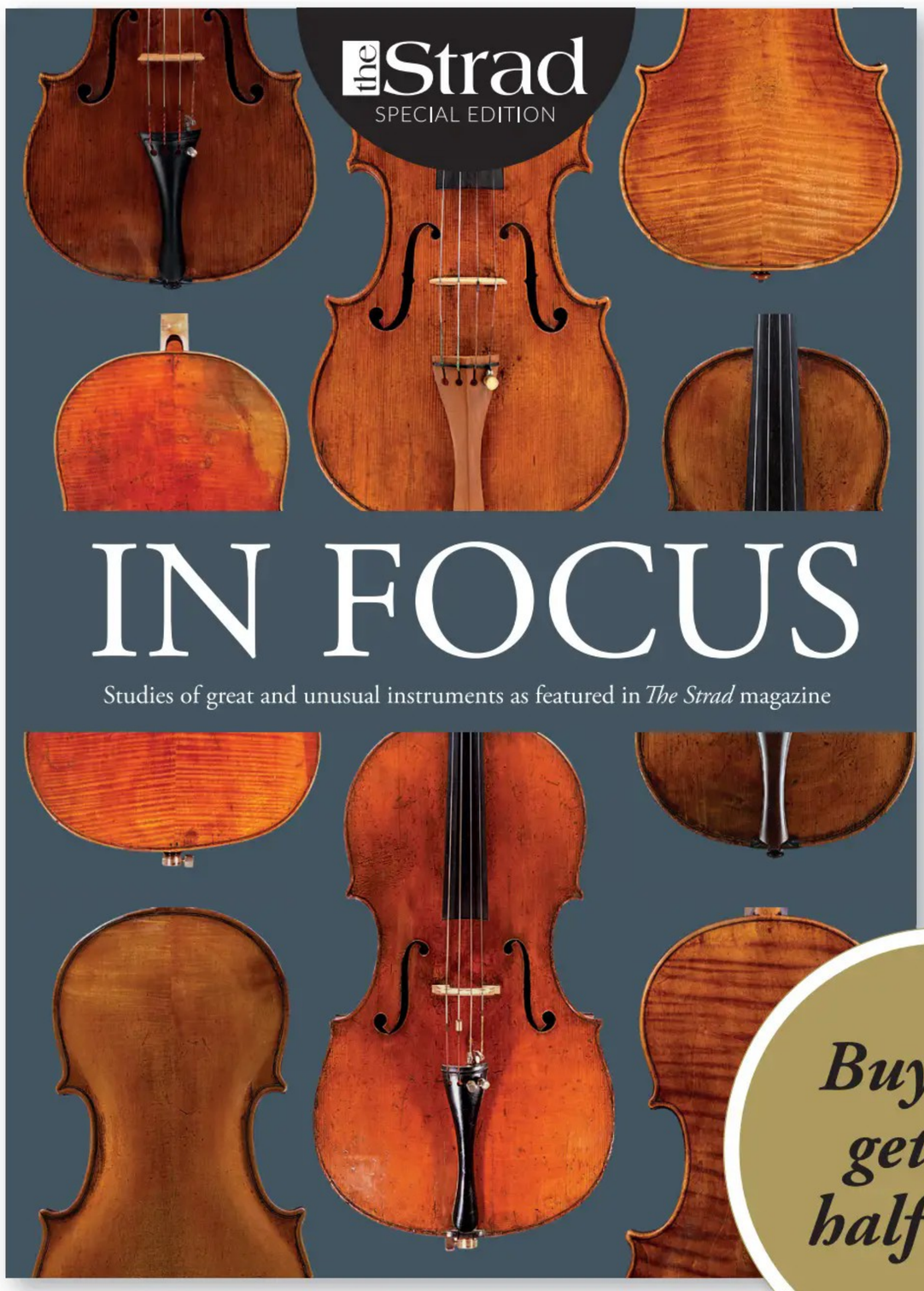

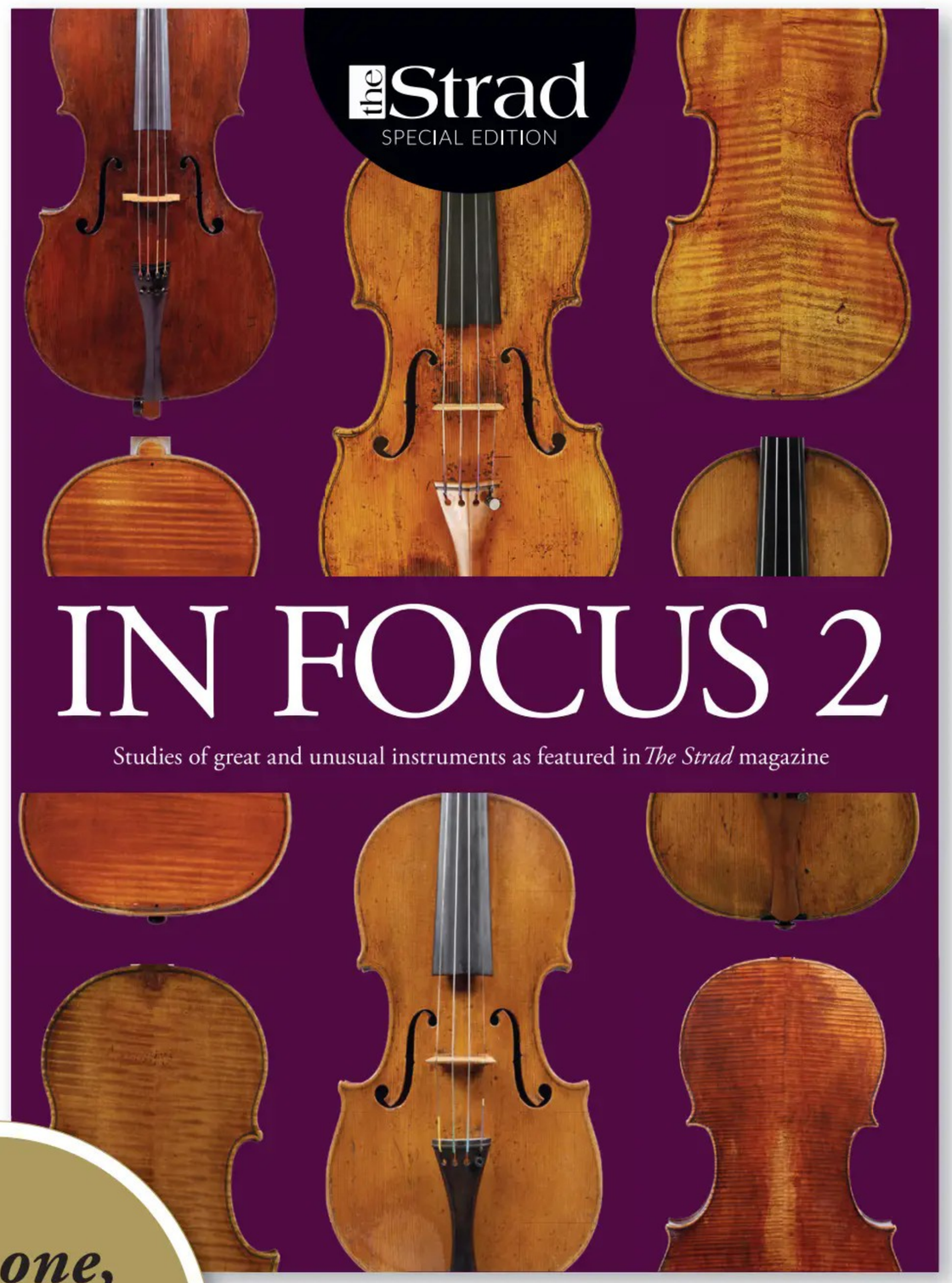

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GIO BATTA MORASSI

WRITTEN BY YURI POCHEKIN

Gio Batta Morassi, one of the foremost figures in 20th-century Cremonese violin making, was born in 1934 in Arta Terme, about 30 miles north of Udine in north-east Italy. Morassi graduated from the Cremona International Violin Making School in 1955 and continued to develop his art under the influence of the great violin makers of that time: Leandro Bisiach, Ferdinando Garimberti and Giuseppe Ornati. In 1957 he became an assistant to Pietro Sgarabotto and in 1959 opened his own workshop in Cremona. Over the years, his stringed instruments were awarded numerous gold medals at international violin making competitions, cementing his reputation as one of the successors to the great classical tradition of Cremonese violin making.

Over the course of his career, Morassi built around a thousand instruments. He died in 2018 and his son Simeone, nephew Giovanni Battista and grandson Giulio continue his work, perpetuating a wonderful family tradition.

Teaching was a very important part of Morassi's life. I had the honour to be under his guidance from 1974 to 1976. This time was very special for me; Morassi's workshop had a very warm, artistic and creative atmosphere.

MAKER
GIO BATTA MORASSI

NATIONALITY
ITALIAN

BORN
1934

DIED
2018

INSTRUMENT
VIOLA

DATE
1969

MATERIALS

The 1969 viola shown here is one of the best and most important works of Gio Batta Morassi's middle period. The one-piece back is of spectacular Bosnian maple, with a deep flame which descends from the right. The two-piece belly is of Italian spruce. The grain is of medium width, widening towards the edges. The ribs are cut from the same maple as the back. The scroll differs from the back and ribs, being of a less vivid maple.

FORM AND CONSTRUCTION

The viola was made to Morassi's personal model, using an external mould and revealing the influence of Giuseppe Ornati and Ferdinando Garimberti. All parts of the instrument are made with artistic and technical virtuosity, in perfect harmony with each other.

F-HOLES

The well-balanced f-holes, based on a beautiful personal model, are carved with exceptional precision.

PURFLING

The purfling is inserted very neatly, and is especially artistic at the corners. The 'black' strips are 0.3mm wide, while the 'white' is 0.6mm.

VARNISH

The viola is coated with a very beautiful and transparent but fairly matt yellow-brown spirit-based varnish with shades of red, applied over a gold-coloured sealing ground.

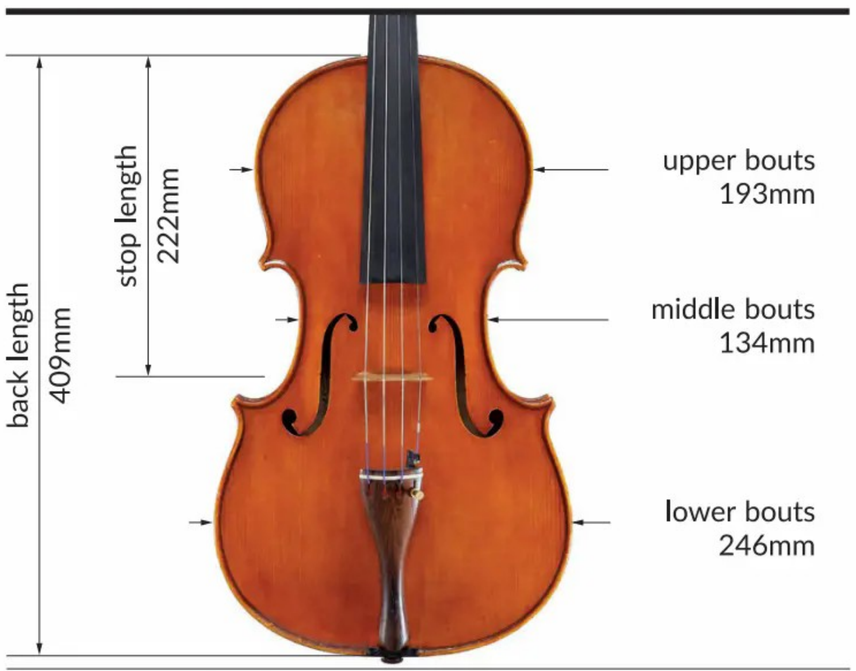
SCROLL

The viola's scroll is excellent in both its model and its artistic craftsmanship. It is executed very harmoniously, with an extraordinary balance between the right and left sides.

LABEL

The label reads: 'Scuola Cremonese / Gio Batta Morassi / Utinensis fecit Cremonae anno 1969'. It also bears Morassi's signature and the handwritten number 172. ▹

ALL PHOTOS SIMEONE MORASSI



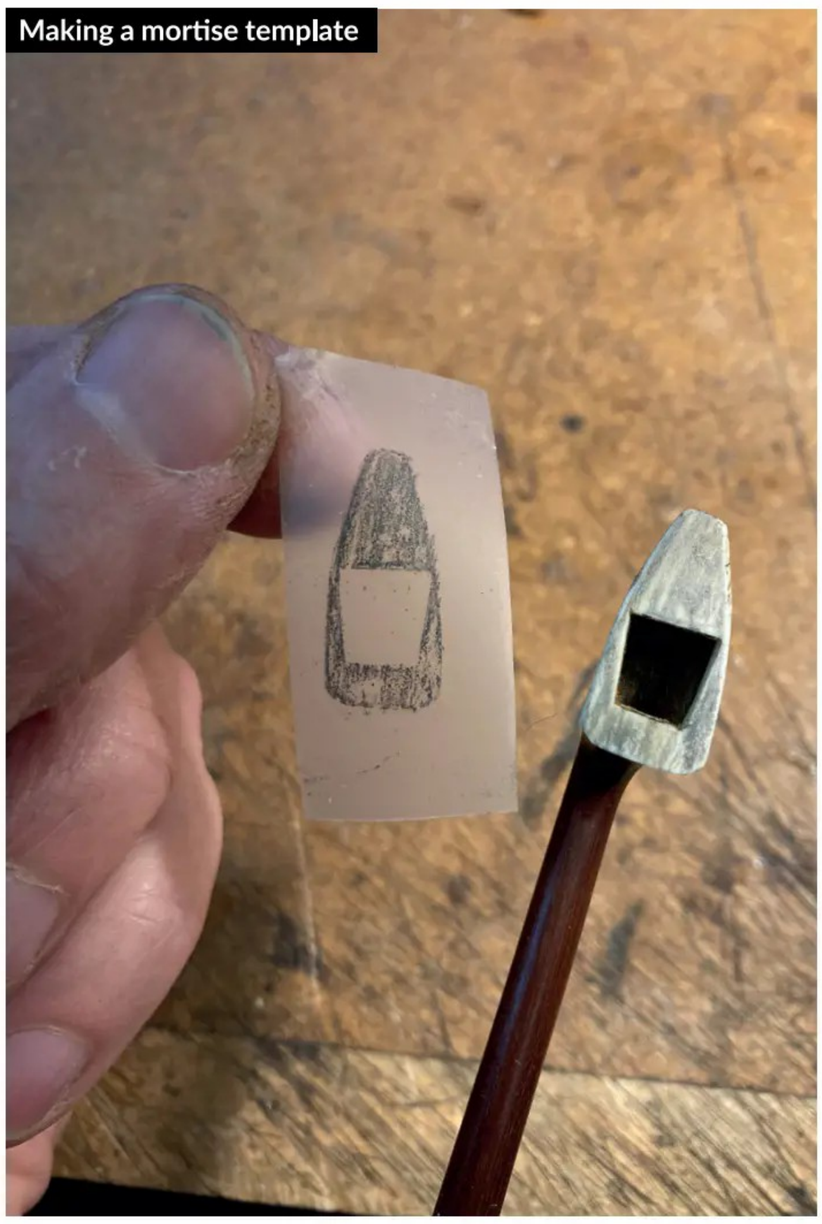
All measurements taken with a tape measure

Bow tip replacement – part one

A detailed method to remove an old tip and fit a new one, before shaping

BY JENELLE STEELE
Luthier and bow maker based in Portland, OR, US

The tip on a bow has several jobs: to protect the pernambuco head from damage, to reinforce the mortise in the head and to look stylistically cohesive. I recommend replacing tips that are no longer performing their functional duties, especially tips that have cracks or are missing any pieces around the mortise. In this two-part article, I'll describe my step-by-step process of replacing a tip. This first part describes my process for removing an old tip and fitting and gluing a new one.



Making a mortise template

1 My standard tip material is Elforyn, which is flexible, easy to carve and looks nice. If there have been any repairs in the head, then I'll use Tip Shield or Tip Armor for reinforcement. These two products are incredibly durable but take longer to shape. I avoid using mammoth ivory for ethical reasons as well as travel/sales limitations.

I study pictures of bows by the original maker, if possible, or by makers from the same region and time period. I note the thickness of the ebony and ivory on the headplate and beak, the curve and ridge in the beak area, and the mortise shape that I want to copy. If I don't have much information about the bow, I use the thicknesses in the table below as a starting point. The ebony liner, ivory flat and ivory beak thicknesses get consecutively thicker by 150 per cent.

To be kind to my future self, I make a mortise template by covering the old headplate surface in graphite and putting clear tape over it, removing it, and saving it for later. This will help me to carve the mortise in the new tip more quickly and accurately.

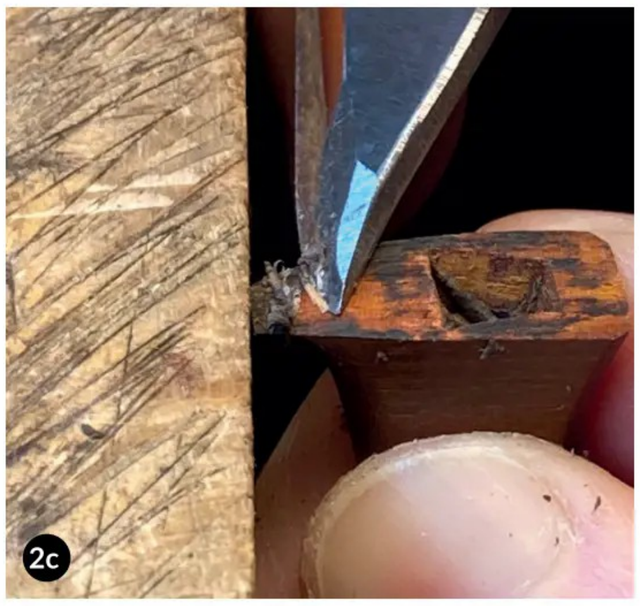
	Ebony liner (mm)	Ivory flat (mm)	Ivory beak (mm)
Violin/viola	0.5	0.75	1.125
Cello	0.6	0.9	1.35
Bass	0.8	1.2	1.8

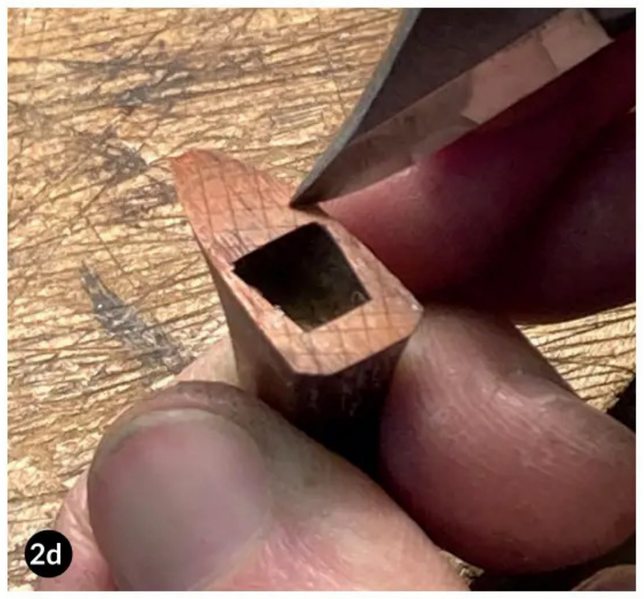
ALL PHOTOS JENELLE STEELE

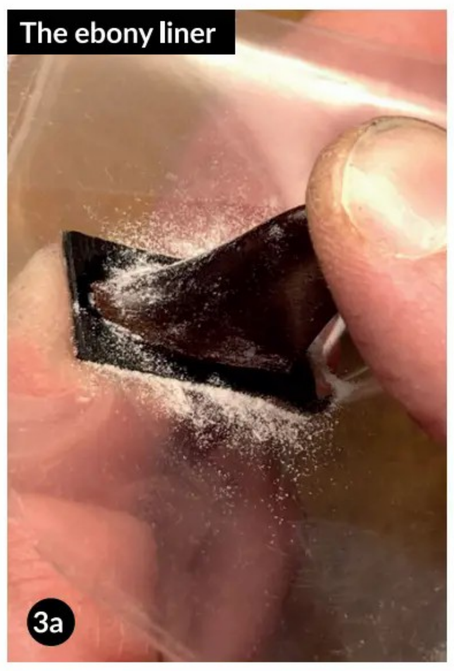
2 I first cut off the ivory beak by using a chisel to cut down between the ivory and ebony, with support behind the headface (2a). I then carefully insert a knife between the ebony liner and the ivory at the back of the head, cutting towards the beak and up and away from the head to remove the ivory headface (2b). The tip will usually pop off in chunks, so I press it against the bench for stability. Removing the ivory nose first helps prevent damage to the pernambuco when removing the rest of the plate.

Then I carefully cut most of the ebony liner off with the knife (2c). To remove the remaining ebony and glue, I use a flat hand file. Whenever I am filing something, I mark it generously with graphite first to help me understand where I am removing material. I also frequently check my file to make sure I'm filing glue and ebony (white or black dust) and not hitting the pernambuco (orange dust). Checking that the headface is flat from side to side is especially important.

I rub soap or wax on the sides and back of the head, and anywhere I don't want the glue to adhere. I then thoroughly clean the headplate surface with alcohol and use a knife to cross-hatch the headplate surface (2d).







3 I apply Scotch tape on one side of the ebony veneer that is at the finished thickness measurement. I cut it long enough to cover the headplate and leave 5mm for the beak plus a little extra. I cut off the little ebony beak piece and save it for later. I clean the non-taped side of ebony with alcohol and then hold it against the pernambuco headplate surface as if gluing it. This is an opportunity to make sure that there are no gaps between the ebony and the pernambuco headface, that the ebony overhangs the pernambuco on all edges, and that the grain of the ebony runs parallel to the sides of the head.

I use a piece of plastic as a barrier between my hands and the taped side of the ebony liner. If the tip is relatively flat, I apply a layer of thick super glue on the non-taped side of the ebony and quickly hand-clamp the ebony in position against the headface for a few minutes (3a). But if the tip is very curved, I hold the liner and head of the bow in place and have a friend help glue it with thin super glue, which will wick between the pernambuco and the ebony liner. In either case, I hold it firmly for a few minutes and have a friend sprinkle baking soda over the top, which helps the glue cure. I then leave it for at least an hour.

Using a chisel, I shape the sides of the face ebony to be slightly narrower near the beak. While supporting the headplate surface against a hard ▹

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cutting surface, I use a sharp chisel to make small cuts directly down through the ebony at the end of the beak (3b). I keep working my way closer to the beak, removing any old ebony and cutting the new ebony to be flush with the pernambuco beak.

Ideally, I want the beak surface to be perpendicular to the stick when viewed from above (3c), although I will always match the original angles and never remove pernambuco to achieve this. The ebony should match the angle of the pernambuco beak when viewed from the side (3d), and from all angles, the beak surface should be flat.

I cut the piece of ebony for the beak into a small square, clean the non-taped side with alcohol, and cross-hatch it with a knife. Using thick super glue, I glue it by pressing firmly in the middle of the beak (3e), making sure that the grain of the ebony is running parallel to the sides of the beak and that the ebony is overhanging every surface. I let it cure for at least an hour.

I keep the backing tape on the ebony pieces for now, and file down the underside of the ebony beak until it is flush with the tape layer on the headplate surface (3f). Then I remove the tape from both pieces of ebony and level it again (3g). I make sure the curve of the headplate surface flows and doesn't dive off at the beak. I again check for side-to-side flatness.

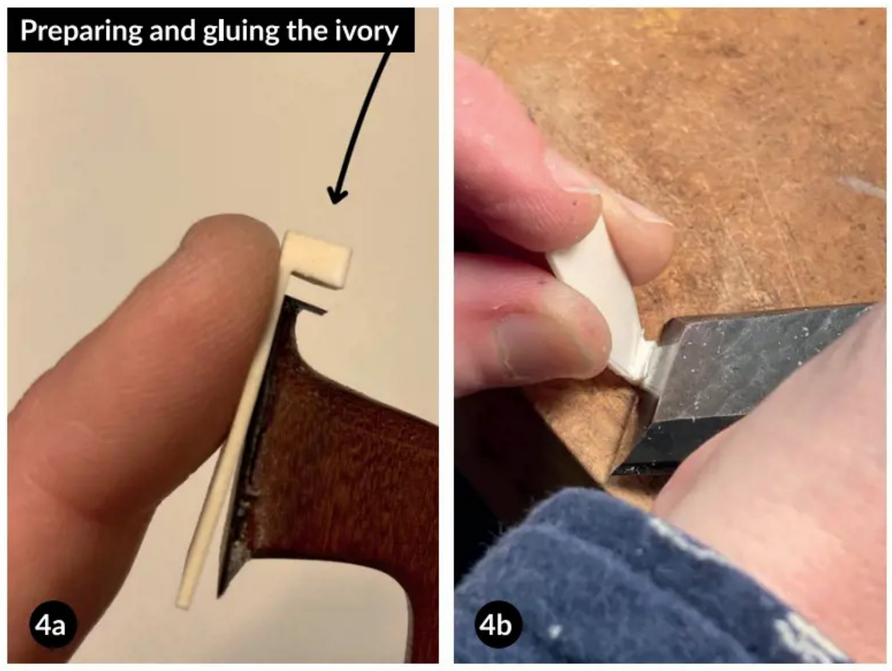
For aesthetic reasons, I want the angle of the ebony nose-liner to the face plate to be 90 degrees or less (3h). If the pernambuco beak angle is greater than this, I will glue on a slightly thicker piece of ebony than the headface ebony and file the angle to be 90 degrees or less.

3e

3f

3g

3h



4a

4b

4c

4d

4 I draw the outline of the ebony-lined tip on the inside of the ivory-tip material and cut it out a little proud of the outline with a jeweller's saw. Then I check if the angle of the ivory beak matches that of the ebony liner. To check it accurately, I hold the ivory headface surface against the ebony headface close to the beak. I slide the ivory down, as shown by the arrow in 4a, until the ivory beak touches the ebony. If the angle doesn't match exactly, I'll score a line at the base of the inside of the ivory beak with a chisel. This helps to avoid removing any material from the ivory flat as I then proceed to cut a slight angle on the inside of the ivory beak with a chisel. I'll keep alternating scoring and cutting until the angles match (4b).

Next, I clean the ivory tip and ebony surface with alcohol and cross-hatch the ebony headface and beak with a knife. I put a small dot of thick super glue on the ebony beak and immediately hold the ivory tip plate on the outside corner of the beak and apply a little pressure (4c). I'll hand-clamp it for a few minutes and set it aside to cure for a few more. Then I put a piece of Scotch tape on the outside of the ivory tip. I'll use a plastic bag as a barrier for my hands and hand-clamp the ivory flat against the ebony. I ask a friend to apply thin super glue along the sides of the tip. I quickly flex the tip, then clamp it solidly. My friend dusts the glue with baking soda while I hold everything in place. After several minutes of holding, I set it aside to cure for at least an hour (4d).

Don't worry, it's supposed to look like that! But have no fear, I'll show you my process for shaping it into a beautiful tip in part two.

MY SPACE

A peek into lutherie workshops around the world

LUTHIER

DANIELA GAIDANO

LOCATION

Meltina, Italy

I moved to this workshop with my husband Alessandro Visintini in 2023 but we've been based in this area for around ten years. We met while playing in the same orchestra; I was a violist, he was a flautist, and both of us wanted to be violin makers! During the pandemic we realised that we really wanted to work together and not have to commute to work, so we spent a long time looking for the perfect space. Now we are in the village of Meltina, around 15 miles north of Bolzano, where all our neighbours are farmers. We also like to leave our newly varnished instruments outdoors to dry in the fresh mountain sun.

We specialise in making the violoncello da spalla, the 'shoulder cello', a kind of small cello that can be played horizontally. I was formerly the co-owner of gut string manufacturer Aquila Strings, and in 2003 we were asked to make strings for Sigiswald Kuijken's first da spalla. I thought it was a big toy for violists, then I tried it and discovered it's an instrument with its own repertoire and dignity. Now I make two main versions, one based on a c.1750 Johann Wagner model and the other on a Badiarov model, more similar to Bach's own Johann Christian Hoffmann of c.1725. People tend to want to try the Wagner model, it being smaller, but the Hoffmann has a longer neck and is good for playing Bach's Sixth Cello Suite, so that's become more popular.

We've now been around most of the musical instrument museums in Europe measuring originals of violoncellos da spalla to improve our knowledge. I once visited a village in Abruzzi to interview the old string makers and ask them to explain the 18th-century treatises, to show me their tools and ways of working. We discovered that what were previously thought to be technical terms were just dialect words that they used all the time! The experience taught me that you have to do first-hand research and meet people whenever possible.

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

My main workbench faces east, which means it gets excellent light in the morning and indirect sunlight later on. The wall hanger and trolley at the side help keep it tidy. Having a large amount of space in the workshop helps a lot with this.

This is the bench where I do most of my bow rehairing. It was built by my father and the wood came from the stairs of the house where I grew up, which makes it a nice reminder of home.

ALL PHOTOS DANIELA GAIDANO

We've found it's a good idea to have our knife sharpener by the window, as it's important to have direct light shining on the blade so you can see the edge.

Right Musicians can test their instruments in the little closed-off area. We use the globe to track the violoncellos da spalla we've sold; three continents so far, and we're hoping to add a fourth this year.

I'm making this violoncello da spalla for a dealer in America. I've decorated it with the flower motif from the shield of the Hafner family, who ruled the area in the 16th century and helped Leopold Mozart organise his Italian trips. This is why I include their shield in my instruments.

It's inspiring for us to be able to look out on to the forests where the wood for our instruments might come from. The Val di Fiemme, where the wood for Stradivari's instruments was sourced, is around 30 miles south of here.

Taking the first step

Making and applying the ground coat is a crucial stage of the varnishing process. **James Ropp** reveals his own method for a preparation containing no oil

Violin with a completed ground coat

The methods described in this article are the methods I use based on extensive research and experimentation. First, let's discuss the purpose of the ground on the tonewood of an oil-varnished stringed instrument. Since I primarily make violins, I will use the violin as the example for this article.

The ground coat serves two basic purposes. First and foremost, it is a sealant forming a barrier between the cells of the tonewood and oils in the varnish. A violin's tonewood produces its beautiful sound, with the tone being generated from the resonant vibrations of the tonewood's cell structure. Any mass added to this cell structure, such as oil, will inhibit the way the tonewood resonates. A good analogy is the effect of a mute on the violin bridge on its tone and projection.

The second purpose of the ground is the aesthetic quality it provides. The finest examples of the beauty that a ground adds are the instruments made during the Cremonese 'golden age' of violin making.

There are many recipes for making a violin ground, and there are many off-the-shelf grounds that can be purchased. I have my own personal recipe that I developed after much trial and error. If you are thinking of formulating your own ground, here are the criteria I used.

First of all, select a medium that will bond with the wood and the varnish you will be using. This medium forms a thin layer on the tonewood and must not penetrate deeply into it. Some traditional recipes use mediums such as egg whites or gelatine, which work well as they are not soluble in oil, turpentine or alcohol. The medium I personally use contains no oils and is water-soluble.

I have found that adding a percentage of limestone can soften the tone of a violin slightly. You can experiment with varying amounts of powdered limestone

ADDING A PERCENTAGE OF LIMESTONE CAN SOFTEN THE TONE OF A VIOLIN SLIGHTLY

Materials used in the preparation

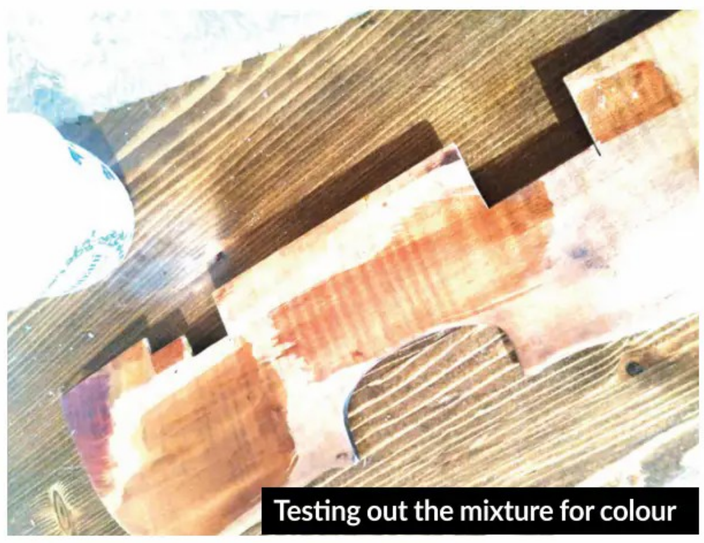
or other minerals to vary the tone a little. Remember: any mass you add to the tonewood acts like a mute on a bridge.

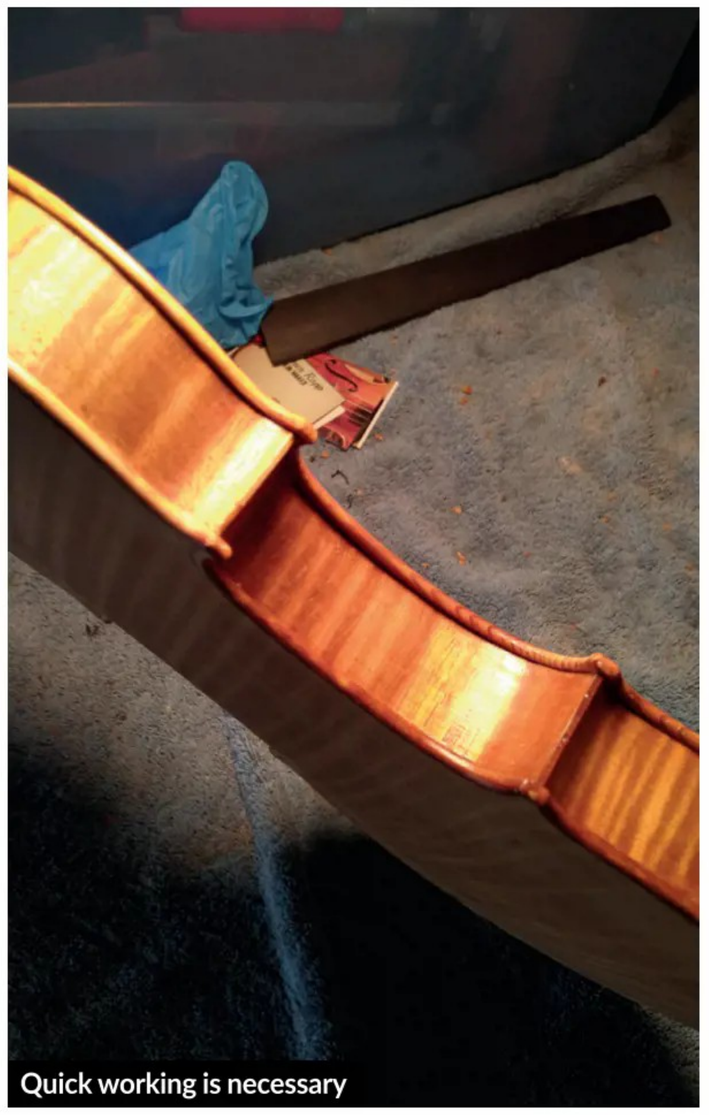
Colouring your ground can be accomplished with modern dyes (such as analine dyes), or with traditional colourants. Here some of the most popular traditional colourants:

Saffron tincture. This is easily prepared and applied as a tincture to colour egg white. The colour quickly mellows from its initial intensity, then stabilises for several weeks. Take a generous pinch of saffron and turn it into powder using a mortar and pestle. Then add a small amount of water and strain it through a coffee filter.

King's Yellow or Orpiment tincture. This is an arsenic colour, so using it is dangerous. It was once considered the best and brightest yellow available.

Mixing the ingredients


Testing out the mixture for colour


Quick working is necessary

Coating the scroll can have some tricky moments

Buckthorn bark tincture. This has a warmer but less brilliant yellow when compared to saffron.

Madder root. While it is reddish at full strength, it is yellower when diluted. Combined with saffron, it becomes a golden yellow. Note: madder root as a colourant will decay when subjected to intense light or sun.

Next, I mix small batches that will be enough for one or two violins. My favourite mixture comprises a quarter-cup of a water-based poly-acrylic enamel as a bonding agent, thinned with about ⅛th of a cup of distilled water. This creates an oil-proof barrier. I also add two or three drops of amber-yellow aniline dye, which will not fade when exposed to light. You can also use undiluted albumin, which is another of my favourites as a bonding agent. Casein or collagen dissolved in water to a semi-thick consistency can also be used as a bonding agent. If you use a modern aniline dye, two or three drops of an amber yellow will be sufficient. If you prefer using a natural colourant such as saffron, add as needed. Start with a small amount of colourant, and test on scrap tonewood until you get the colour and intensity you desire.

(A quick note on using albumin: this is made by whipping egg whites until they form peaks when the whisk or mixer is lifted. The whipped egg whites are then covered and put into the refrigerator overnight. The clear liquid at the bottom of the bowl is albumin, which can be used at full strength with the colourant and additives.)

Then you can apply the ground coat evenly to the violin plate with broad, even brush strokes. Work quickly as the mixture will dry very fast, and you should avoid overlapping areas where the ground has already dried.

Allow it to dry thoroughly before applying one or two more coats of the ground, lightly sanding with 1,000-grit sandpaper between coats. If saffron is used for the colourant, I prefer to use a UV lightbox to stabilise the colour and to help with darkening the tannins in the wood. A couple of days usually accomplishes this for me. Once the intensity and smoothness have been accomplished with your ground coats, then your varnish coats can be applied.

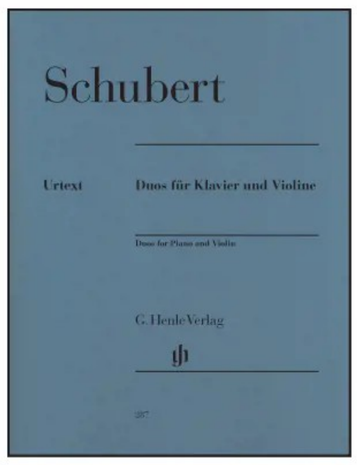
I have found that keeping any oils from penetrating the cell structure of the tonewood to be extremely important in producing an instrument with great tone and projection. With this in mind, I never handle the unfinished wood with my bare hands and always use protective gloves. My concern started about eight years ago from reading an article about the effects of oil infused into tonewoods. In the article, a well-made violin was left in the white. The instrument was played and the tone and projection noted. The research found that the more the violin was handled, the less projection it had and the tone also degraded. I have attempted to reference the article, but have not been able to locate it again.

ALL PHOTOS JAMES ROPP

MASTERCLASS

SCHUBERT FANTASY FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO – PART ONE

Violinist **Alena Baeva** stresses the importance of slow and attentive practice when embarking on the opening sections of this monumental work, in the first of a two-part article



From Franz Schubert Duos for Piano and Violin Urtext edition with marked and unmarked string parts. Ed. Ernst Herttrich Pf fingering Hans-Martin Theopold Vn bowing and fingering Max Rostal Order no. HN 287 · ISMN 979-0-2018-0287-9. Printed with permission of G. Henle Verlag, München © 1976/2004

This piece marks a distinct milestone in the life of any violinist. I remember being struck by it when I was still a student, with Boris Brovtsyn playing. I felt like I was being taken on a journey. This work is unique through its shape and the form of how it's composed. It comprises different musical souls that beautifully and carefully unfold and develop, as if someone is reminiscing or telling their life story. You feel completely changed after listening to this piece.

Creating a dream-like sound world

The beginning is one of the most magical moments in music. The special feature of the way it starts is the piano part, which begins with very soft tremolo. It reminds me of morning fog, which disappears before your eyes as the sun rises. Through this, the piano creates a dream-like sound world; a short, four-bar invitation for the ethereal violin entry. I touch the string very softly but I make sure that the sound is present, like a ray of light. The way it develops is very beautiful; it's as if time doesn't exist.

There is a fragile balance between the continuous tremolo of the piano, which develops harmonically, and the violin part within it. It gives a feeling of anticipation, as if something immense is about to happen. It's a challenge to create this sense of direction because there are no dynamics apart from pianissimo at bar 5 and a hairpin in bars 7 to 8. Ideally it should be free-flowing, like a river that gets wider and wider, or someone's stream of consciousness as they think out loud. This is the embodiment of a fantasy. For a soft and muted colour I start the first C on the D string.

Bow control poses one of the biggest challenges at the beginning. You almost have to pretend you have an endless bow as you need to make sure you can't hear any bow

JEAN-BAPTISTE MILLOT

THE SOLOIST

NAME
ALENA BAEVA

NATIONALITY
LUXEMBOURGISH

STUDIED WITH
OLGA DANILOVA, EDUARD GRACH, SHLOMO MINTZ

RECORDS FOR
ALPHA CLASSICS

'You almost have to pretend you have an endless bow in this other-worldly beginning'

Alena Baeva performs works by Schubert, Stravinsky, Schumann and Messiaen with pianist Vadym Kholodenko on their album *Fantasy*, out now on Alpha Classics

changes in this other-worldly beginning. The mood also comes together with vibrato; there is no right or wrong way. Some people vibrate from the beginning of the note and others will develop the vibrato gradually, or you can go towards the middle of the note in the way that a singer's voice can develop through a long note. There are different options so you can exercise some freedom here, but make sure it serves a purpose and that it's not automatic. There must always be intention behind the notes.

From bar 33 there is a little cadenza for the violin, which feels like a big question mark in E major – the dominant to the upcoming A minor. It should be completely free. However, it's quite demanding for intonation as it's not the most pleasant key for the violin and it's very pianistically written! This can be an indicator of nerves during performance and I often don't get it perfect myself, so please don't be discouraged!

A dynamic conversation between violin and piano

In the next section marked Allegretto there is a dialogue between violin and piano. The theme is played first by the violin, then the piano picks it up in bar 63, which sparks a canon.

The beginning, marked *piano*, should not be too soft because later in bars 53 and 73 you get two pianissimos and it can be difficult to make the distinction in dynamic. We don't get our first true forte until bar 83 and then it goes straight back to *piano*, but this is a different character from the beginning of the Allegretto. It's important therefore to use articulation to highlight these differences. The use of varied articulation is a powerful tool to help you shape the notes the way you want.

Schubert's accents should be regarded as rhetorical emphasis, as opposed to a more 'vertical' articulation. Notes can be highlighted with accents in different ways, with the length of the note or timing of the release. It's closely connected to historically informed performance, where the dominant holds more tension than the resolution of the tonic. There are so many accents written in this section, so we need to make sure they don't sound too literal. Make sure to be very aware of what the pianist is doing with their phrasing in bar 45 when they have the melody, as you need to support dynamically.

In bars 53 and 54 I like to play the first note longer than the second before the semiquaver (𝅘𝅥𝅯) passages. I aim not to play this metronomically, but instead with intuition and trust in my pianist. The semiquavers should sound precipitando, like they're falling. It's rewarding to explore what kind of rubato you can do with your pianist – don't be afraid to try new things in your practice. Some of Schubert's pieces are so long and repetitive, but he is able to create a unique feeling of adjusted time, where you can feel freedom within the bar-lines.

A strategy to practise string-crossings

Find a position in your right elbow that requires minimal distance to move between the lower and higher strings. You won't have time to move too much, so find the perfect spot to allow you to move effectively and musically without being too active.

One of the most challenging bars for me is bar 123. It's not written idiomatically for the violin – in the second beat of semiquavers you have the 5th played by the first finger in a rather awkward part of the violin! To practise this, it helps to put down all three fingers in the formation of the chord. Practise the chords split into double-stops comprising two notes each. I practise very slowly by playing the first two notes staccato with a very distinct gap between the two notes. Cross the string in the silence between them. This helps enormously with articulation and teaching your right hand where to play. Repeating this will give you clarity as the hand will remember what to do. With the second two semiquaver notes, play with exaggerated martelé, again with a gap between the notes. Use the gap to cross the string and prepare your next finger, then play again. This strategy was life-saving for me and helped me in so many difficult places. You are teaching your hands to prepare, rather than scramble at the last minute. You'll be able to play the music in basically any tempo after practising slowly in this way.

An eternal E major passage

Going onwards from bar 131, again, the character suggests that the music is preparing for something bigger. We are stuck in the dominant tension of E major for a very long time until bar 182 – it's like we're constantly trying to open a door. In the chromatic passage from 137, I make sure to play close to the string – not too bouncy or jumpy, but still with some air in the sound. Around bar 173 onwards, I love how there are so many ways to give and respond to your pianist. This is a place where you can be very playful and lively, and the diminuendo from bar 177 towards the key change can sound incredibly dramatic.

Challenging double-stopped octaves

Playing octaves in C sharp minor is uncomfortable, especially in second or fourth position. Remember to practise slowly and have a strong harmonic sense of where the octaves should be, pitch-wise. Sharps should not be too high, which is often the case with violinists. Have a strong harmonic picture of the chord with the piano – even when you're practising alone, you need to imagine the sound of the piano and the key very strongly. It will help you play more in tune.

When there is a shift over the bar-line, I practise by approaching these octaves in different ways, for example with a slow glissando. Imagine moving along a train track to get to your station – you need to map the journey to teach your left hand the distance of the shift, and to help your ears work out what pitch to aim for.

Like the string-crossings earlier, I also like to practise them staccato with a stop after the first note, and then shift between the notes. This helps develop the tactile sensation for the intervals. You need to trust yourself in this process. In doing so we are creating our fingerboard 'map'. When practising difficult shifts, it's about listening to yourself, giving yourself feedback and learning from that information for your next attempt. ▷

INTERVIEW BY DAVINA SHUM

FANTASIE

Violine

Komponiert 1827 · Erschienen 1850

Opus post. 159
D 934

Andante molto

pp

Klav.

tr

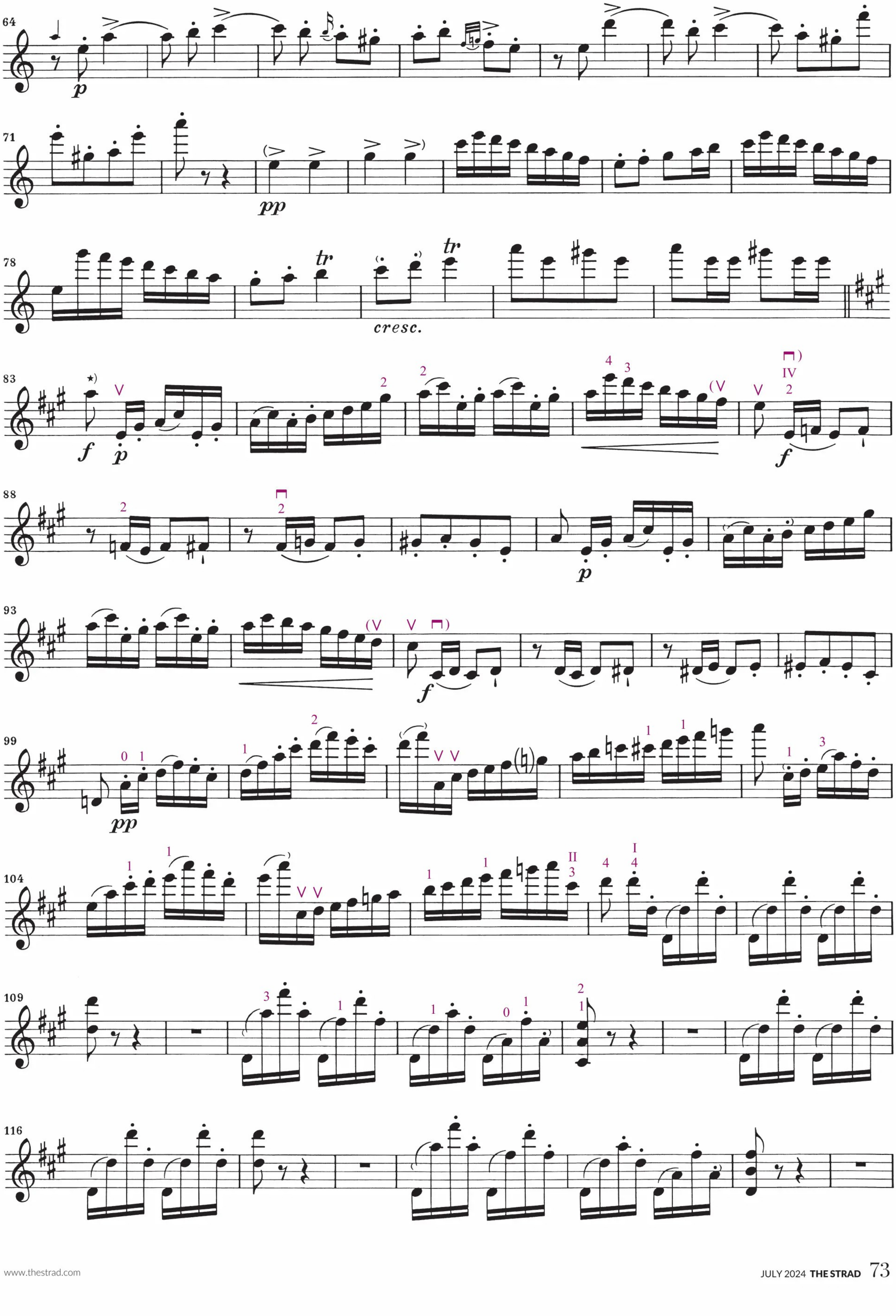
decresc.

Allegretto

p

pp

cresc.

Klav.

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104
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109
3
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1
0 1
2
1
116

123
cresc.
129
135
p
140
decresc.
145
pp
150
157
Klav.
168
176
dim.
Klav.
pp
184
pizz.

194 arco

cresc. *p*

203 *pp*

210

215 *tr* *tr*

cresc. *f* *p*

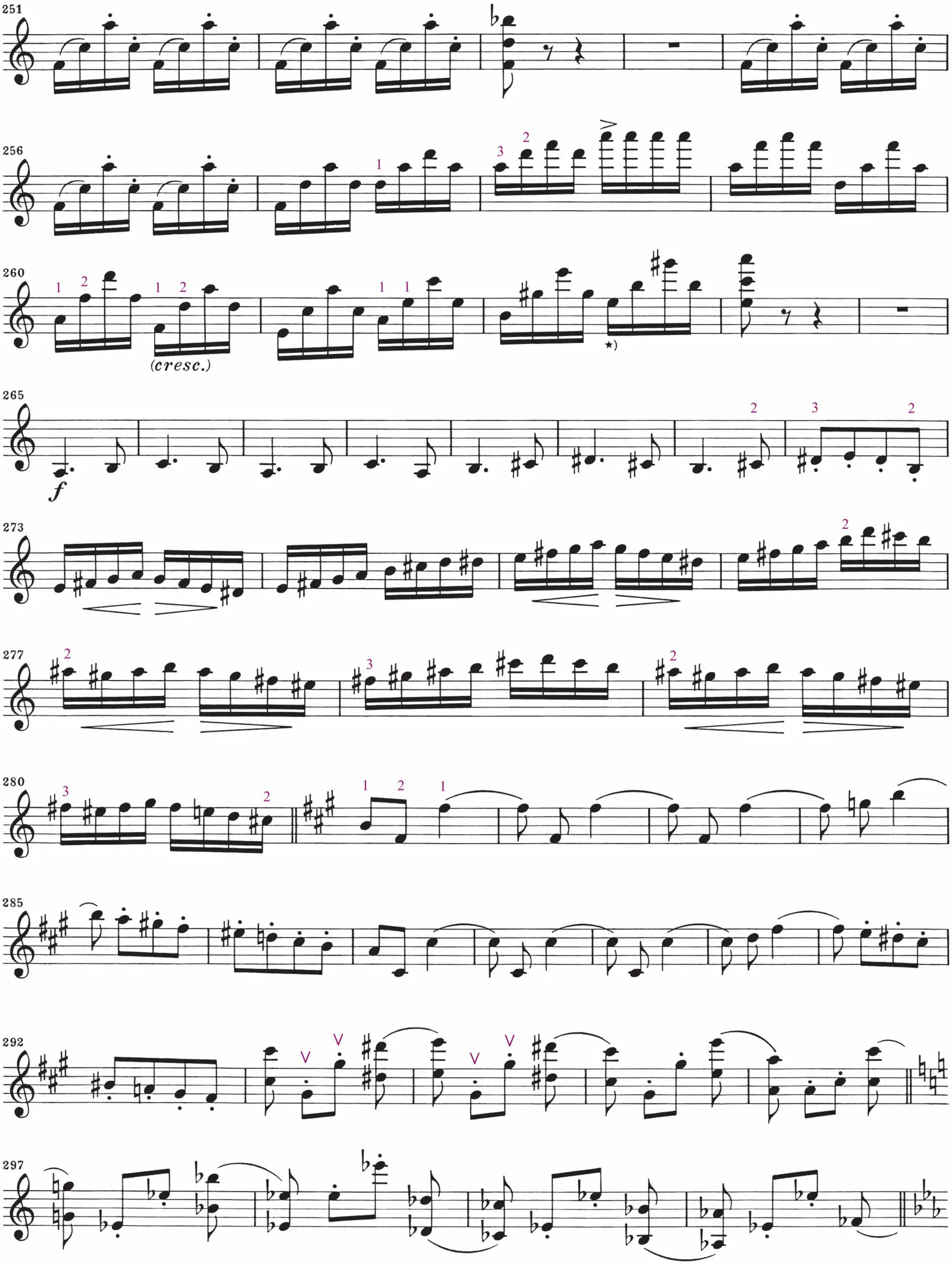
221 *f*

226 *p*

231 *f* *pp*

237

241

245

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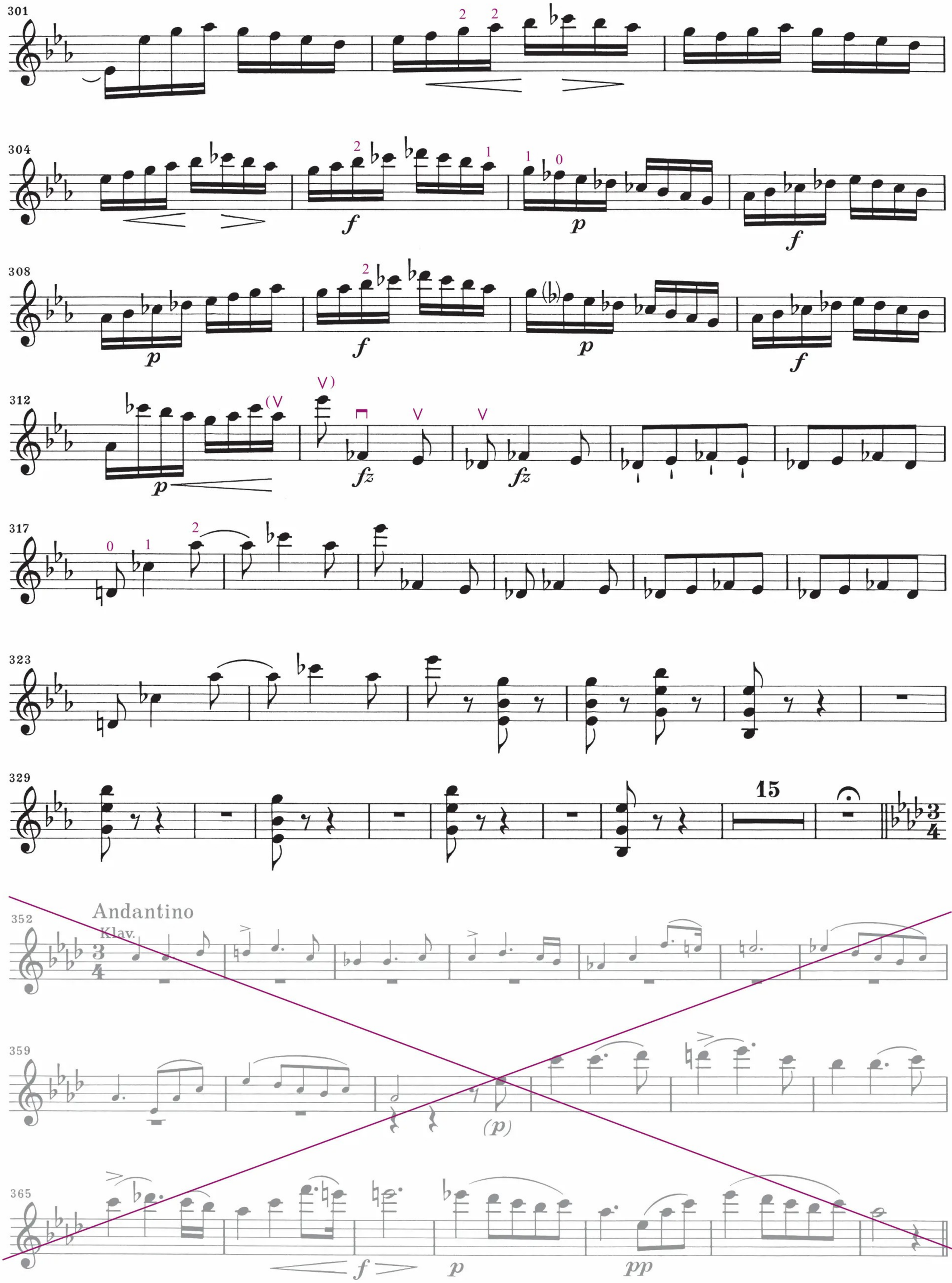
301
304
308
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323
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352
Andantino
Klav.
359
365

All together now

Continuity and intention in the bowing arm

CLIFTON HARRISON

Kreutzer Quartet violist, viola d'amore player and researcher, Benedetti Foundation tutor and ESTA board member

BORN
Raleigh, NC, US

STUDIED WITH
Karen Tuttle, Heidi Castleman, Misha Amory, David Holland

TEACHES
all ages

My approach to playing and teaching has been very much influenced by Karen Tuttle, a viola professor famous for having developed 'coordination technique', which has been adopted by many viola players worldwide. Indeed, this type of training and understanding of the mind and body has elicited almost a cult following, especially in the viola world.

Central to its ethos is the belief that everything about the way you play should be deliberate and coordinated – and that your breath, body and mind should come together with intention. As a player who has suffered a leg injury that is long-term and permanent, I have valued this approach immensely and I have used it to listen to my body better, readjusting the way I play post-injury to find what is optimum for me so that my injury doesn't impact on the rest of my playing body.

Understanding how the right-hand arm influences the sound is vital; not just in the draw of the sound but in the reflex and the reaction. Remember, within your hand and arm there is a large clutch of components, with the muscles, joints, ligaments and tendons working together. When these coordinate, you allow yourself the possibility of creating in reality the sound you envisage in your head. Set-up requires a lot of care with focus along the entire bow stroke; after all, the instrument is bigger than the violin, while the bow is heavier and shorter, with the player having to navigate thicker strings.

Often students think that once they get a good motion going with their bowing arm, this is the be-all and end-all. In fact, the draw is just one component. It is equally important to be conscious of both the beginning and the end of the draw, and to know where the note that you are playing has been and where it is going, and to sense its intention.

There may also be a tendency for the right hand to be rather static and, just as it is impossible to speak with diction if your mouth does not move, so it is impossible to have any feeling of enunciation with your right hand if it lacks fluidity. In addition, the importance of gravitational weight given by the world for free may be overlooked because the body of the student is out of balance.

GET THE FEELING

Imagine that you have huge rubber bands hung from the ceiling and attached to each wrist. Bounce your hands down, then let the 'bands' take your hands up again. Then repeat but with your hands pointing forwards, as if to bow your instrument, then bouncing back so the wrists are forwards.

Translate this idea to your whole body. Flick down from the waist while letting your knees bend, imagining you are held by the 'band', then come up with a reflexive bounce.

JOANNA WILKINSON

EXERCISES

Without your instrument, play a series of open strings on your imaginary viola, consciously taking your mind to your feet, your ankles, your knees, your hips and your torso to check that you feel soft and relaxed in each area.

Now, with your instrument this time, play a series of open strings using full bows with flat hair.

Stop between each one to think about the following aspects of what is happening with your body as you play:

- Are you conscious of every movement that you are making as you play, and are you mindful of your whole body including your breathing?
- Imagine that the note you are about to play is already sounding around you and that you are merely joining in with it. As you add your sound to this imaginary note, observe in a detached way how your actions are contributing to its sound.
- Play a down bow while saying out loud to yourself in words what you feel as you play, and examining for yourself what feels right in terms of contact point and bow positioning. As you do this, think of the comfort of what you are doing and whether your right-hand elbow could be better positioned. (Is it high or low enough for your body shape? Ideally your forearm should be parallel to the floor if starting on the C or G string.)
- Draw another down bow along the string from the heel as slowly as is possible for you to play with a clear tone. Be mindful as you start the note. Use 'bite' articulation and observe the arc in the arm necessary to draw out a note that allows the bow to remain straight to the bridge. Be aware of the compromises that you have to make in your body to keep the bow on the string and consistently straight while being fluid and connected; you'll notice that it makes sense to lead with your elbow as you draw a down bow, then to complete the bow stroke by letting your forearm follow through to the wrist and fingers.
- Then take your attention to the up bow. Notice that the opposite compromises are made, this time with an initial lead from the forearm and follow-through with the wrist and fingers.
- Take your attention to your fingers on the bow. Imagine that they are joining in with the movement of the bow and facilitating its balance rather than gripping in any way.

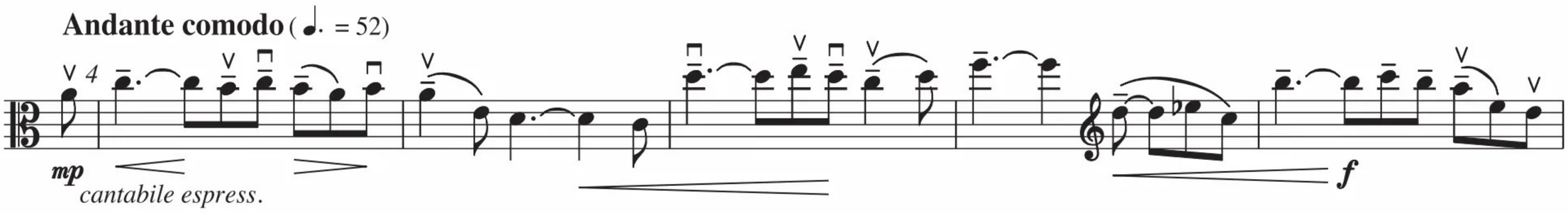
After this, play a one-octave scale – say C or D major – in first position:

- Use a metronome at a suitable speed to allow yourself to think as you play: ♩ = 40 to start with, and no more than ♩ = 60
- Place your bow at the very heel, checking your forearm position. Play through each stroke of the scale thinking about the flow of your movement in the right arm.
- As you play, take your attention through your feet, your knees, your hips and your torso as you did with your imaginary viola, checking there is a feeling of follow-through in each place
- Feel your right hand connecting and drawing the string, and allow yourself to be conscious of the 'chatter' of your fingers as they respond moment by moment to the draw of the string. This could be theoretical (much as a singer would conjure up a particular image in their minds as they approach a note) or physical, where you are able to see everything going on with the fingers on the bow.

REPERTOIRE

In the first viola entry of William Walton's Viola Concerto (**example 1**), there must be fluidity and continuous movement in the bow changes or the melody will jolt. This translates into the rest of the piece, even the fast passages. Play the first notes individually as if you were playing a scale and lead with your elbow, feeling the angle changes as you move from one string to another. Allow the vibration of the string to vibrate through your fingers. Be aware of the 'chatter' of the various aspects of your body (fingers, wrist, forearm, elbow, shoulder, torso) right along the string. Feel your body release without fear. ▹

EXAMPLE 1 First viola entry of William Walton's Viola Concerto



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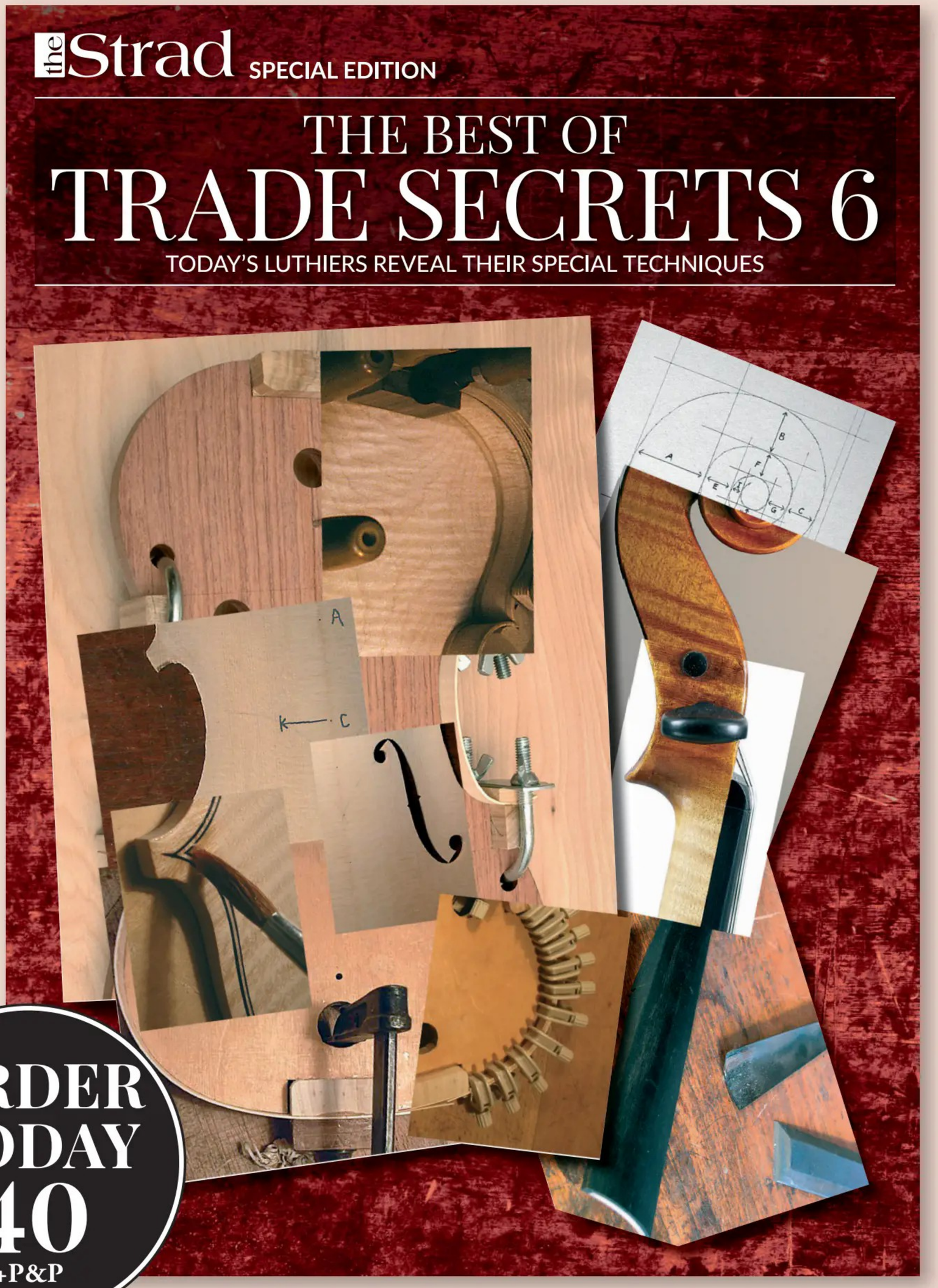
Many of the writers have received awards at prestigious instrument making competitions, with names such as Davide Sora, Nicolas Gilles and Philip Ihle among their number. This new collection will be an essential addition to any violin or bow maker's bookshelf and workbench.



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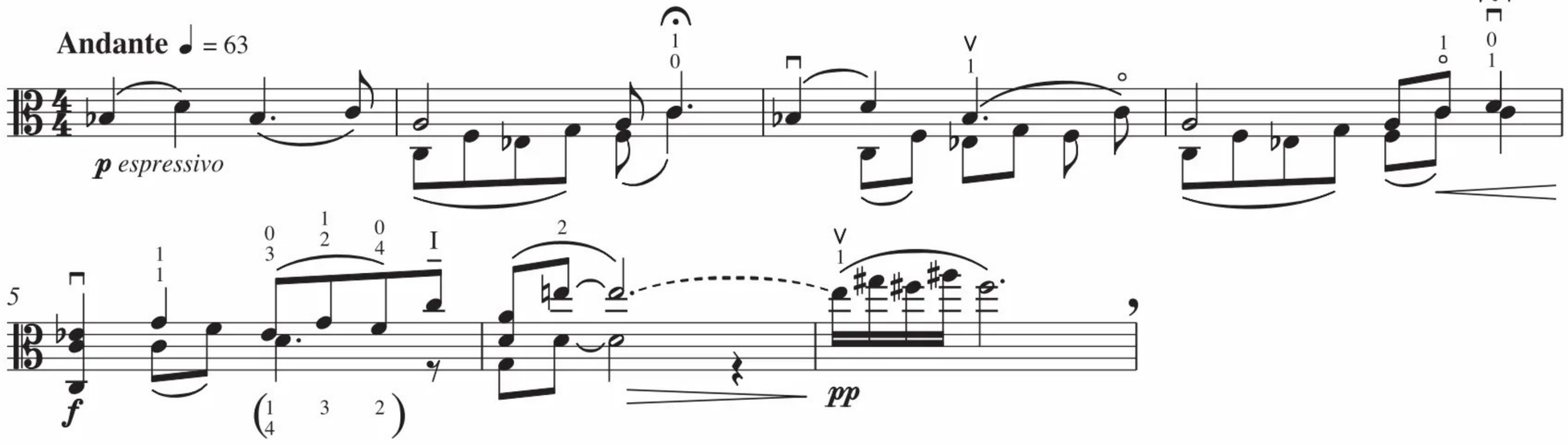
Jessie Montgomery's Rhapsody no.1 for solo viola (**example 2**), starts *piano espressivo* with two themes happening concurrently on the G and C strings. This presents a challenge because, although the dynamic is *piano*, there is an implication that the sound is full; to achieve this it is important to be continuous and fluid with your bow. Start by practising the passage on open strings only, allowing your entire body to focus fully on what is happening in the right arm and hand. Keep your left arm down if you wish. Feel the change of planes in the elbow. Begin near the heel with a high elbow – higher than anyone would usually expect to play, with your forearm positioned higher even than parallel to the ground. Play with a feeling of exploration, stopping periodically to assess what has happened – both the positives and the negatives.

EXAMPLE 2 From Rhapsody no.1 for solo viola by Jessie Montgomery, transcribed from the violin version by the composer



IN YOUR PRACTICE

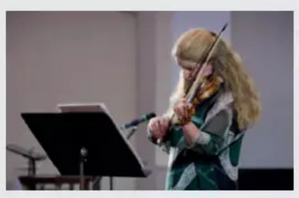
- Warm up using the **Get the Feeling** exercises on page 78
- When you practise make sure that you consider it as a whole-body activity
- Use your ears to listen but also remember to listen to what your body is telling you as you play
- Take time to explore and analyse the resulting outcomes

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Avoid being rigid about 'the right way/the right trajectory'; it is essential to work with the individual student to find the optimum set-up for each. Students will require a tailored approach depending on their body shape and other physical considerations. However, it is important to realise that this is part of a journey of assessment and reassessment that goes on as the player evolves.
- 'Me statements' are good. For example, 'This is how I worked out how to do it,' implying that it might be different for your student, and thereby encouraging them to explore for themselves.
- Younger students whose set-up is likely to be less advanced in the first place might find that the best set-up is not the one that initially feels the most comfortable; sometimes it takes time to appreciate even a positive change
- It is possible that your student may come with an issue such as a previous injury or may have other mobility considerations; it is important in this case to help them come to the realisation that there is not just one way of doing things and that creative solutions may be found with some ingenuity
- It is useful to work on slow passages when exploring issues of fluidity and continuity, so that the thought process behind the playing can be examined deliberately and thoroughly. These fundamentals can then be translated into faster passages as understanding increases.
- Try a number of approaches if your student finds it challenging to listen inwardly to what is going on in their body as they play. If necessary, break down the concepts to help.

INTERVIEW BY NAOMI YANDELL

FURTHER MATERIALS



This performance of the Courante from Bach's Third Cello Suite in C major BWV1009 by **Rachel Podger** on Baroque violin illustrates how the right hand can introduce a huge range of nuance if it is in continuous communication with the joints and full body bit.ly/3w6evvi

Here, **Tabea Zimmermann**'s movements and reactions aptly characterise the diverse sound worlds of each composer (Schubert, Brahms, Kurtág, Falla and Tchaikovsky) and are integral to her performance with pianist Javier Perianes bit.ly/4aJ1N4E

NEXT MONTH
Cellist Inbal Megiddo on tension-free left-hand set-up

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

New York

Mesmerising Schubert from the Danish Quartet and Johannes Rostamo (second right)

JERUSALEM QUARTET

92NY 16 APRIL 2024

As a friend who adores string quartets has repeatedly said, Haydn quartets require a high degree of precision in intonation, and in the Quartet in E flat major op.76 no.6, the Jerusalem Quartet proved her thesis correct. Particularly in the skeletally exposed upper registers, the ensemble's deft reading showed skill and judgement, as the foursome sent the ticklish passages flying into the ether. But the group's tuning expertise also appeared in the richly resonant chords that came in between. The final movement, taken at a torrential pace, only cemented the delight that resulted from the high-wire acrobatics.

For Brahms's Third Quartet the group relaxed into a more luxurious richness, with violist Ori Kam on particularly fine form in the slow movement as his colleagues deferred to him in muted splendour. In contrast to the sparkle of the Haydn, the foursome opted for a juicier, plusher approach that made perfect sense.

When considering Shostakovich's quartets, no.2 is rife with quietude, as well as being the longest of the 15, except for the last one. Yes, forceful bow strokes rained down and the composer's dissonances registered with piercing accuracy, but the overall sense was more genial and gentle than usual. We love the Shostakovich that stings, but we also love the one that finds profundity in peacefulness and grace.

BRUCE HODGES

DANISH QUARTET, JOHANNES ROSTAMO (CELLO)

ZANKEL HALL, CARNEGIE HALL 18 APRIL 2024

The inimitable Danish Quartet was joined by Finnish cellist Johannes Rostamo for a night of exquisite music-making at Carnegie Hall. The opening Allegro of Schubert's magnificent C major String Quintet was mesmerising from the first chord – its energy, bow speed and vibrato all immaculately matched among the players. This movement was a study in unhurried elegance – every note, every phrase given with care and attention. The start to the Adagio was bravely quiet, while the F minor middle section was appropriately formidable.

FADI KHEIR

THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

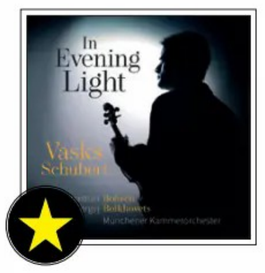
Our pick of the new releases

Beethoven to treasure from a stellar threesome

PAGE 87

Laura van der Heijden: a British cello concerto album to cherish

PAGE 88



Sebastian Bohren excels in a Vasks premiere

PAGE 90

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

Joy and humour characterised the Scherzo, which was followed by a stately Trio. In the finale, delicate arpeggios contrasted with moments of rusticity to magical effect.

Thomas Adès's *Wreath (for Franz Schubert)* received its New York premiere, a work that uses bowed inner voices while first violin and cello are pizzicato. The piece is constructed in such a way that each part reacts to another one, creating an almost meditative movement as the phrases ebb and flow, with no two bars replicating exactly the same harmonies or rhythms. Despite its complex structure, the Danish Quartet created a sound world that felt almost simple – and simply beautiful.

The programme concluded with an arrangement of 'Die Nebensonnen' from *Winterreise*, played with exquisite beauty and generosity of sound, followed by an encore by Carl Nielsen – an arrangement of the melancholy song *Underlige Aftenlufte* performed with the same transcendent beauty that epitomised the entire evening.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

Philadelphia

QUATUOR ÉBÈNE

PERELMAN THEATER 6 APRIL 2024

It's not often that a group seems slightly rattled by audience noise, but in the second half of the concert, shortly after Quatuor Ébène began Schubert's vast G major Quartet D887, a stray sound in the Perelman Theater audience caused its first violinist to stop abruptly, toss a few impatient words towards the left side of the hall, and then start again. Not to make light of the disruption, but – given the quality of the playing – it would be hard not to take a small bit of pleasure from hearing a portion of the work twice. It is high praise when an ensemble can regroup so effectively after a disruption, and ultimately the Ébène's artistry, not to mention the composer's majesty, shone forth.

Thankfully, the first half proceeded without incident, starting with Haydn's String Quartet in G minor op.20 no.3, given appropriate gravitas in the opening movement and the Menuetto. But if the work is less ticklish than some of the composer's other quartets, the players managed to boost the effervescence by the sheer will of their tone and expert timing.

For Bartók's Third String Quartet, a 15-minute coiled spring of a piece, the foursome gave each of the composer's rare minerals its own focus and microscopic attention. Aside from marvelling at the sheer calibre of the playing, we were made aware of the research and discussion that underpinned the actual performance – the result bringing many in the audience to their feet in admiration.

BRUCE HODGES

YO-YO MA (CELLO) KATHRYN STOTT (PIANO)

VERIZON HALL 12 APRIL 2024

In the classical music world, few artists can sell out a 2,500-seat hall, but cellist Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Kathryn Stott (*right*) did that easily, with demand adding an extra two dozen or so seats on stage at Verizon Hall. From the opening set – bookended by Fauré's *Berceuse* and *Papillon*, with Dvořák, Assad and Nadia Boulanger in between – the cellist demonstrated the impossibly seductive tone of his 1733 Montagnana, one of three instruments in his arsenal.

For some of us, the Shostakovich Cello Sonata might have been the spiritual heart of the evening, with its interior monologue again benefiting from sheer tonal beauty. But for many in the packed house, Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* was the centrepiece: an icon of simplicity, given an extraterrestrial gloss with photographs taken by the Hubble Space Telescope projected on a giant overhead screen, courtesy of the artist John Syzonenko.

To close we had Franck's Violin Sonata in its familiar arrangement for cello by Jules Delsart, which continued the evening's mellow cast. If the occasion overall had a more subdued air than usual, there was an additional whiff of nostalgia: Ma explaining in his notes that Stott will be retiring from the concert stage this year, ending their four-decade collaboration.

Encores were all but mandatory, and the duo obliged with an appropriately reverent account of Bloch's *Prayer* and ending with *Cristal* by César Camargo Mariano, sending the crowd home on a high of jazzy adrenalin.

BRUCE HODGES

MARK MANN

London

QUATUOR DANEL

WIGMORE HALL 19 MARCH 2024

Quatuor Danel offered an intense Russian programme at this Wigmore Hall concert, starting with Shostakovich's Fourth Quartet. The full sound of the opening gave way to intimate, delicate dialogues, and in the second-movement Andantino leader Marc Danel produced a great dramatic arc in his opening soliloquy over deadpan inner voices. The busy third movement was uneasy, propulsive and full of little surges, and in the finale the Jewish themes had an uneasy restlessness to them.

Mieczysław Weinberg's Fourth Quartet followed, played with constant high energy and clarity of texture. There was vehemence in the macabre, unsettling Moderato assai, with an abundance of aggressive acciaccaturas and cellist Yovan Markovitch giving the high-lying lines a bleak beauty. In the third movement, with its curious marking of Largo marciale, second violinist Gilles Millet and violist Vlad Bogdanas were severe but expressive.

In Shostakovich's Fifth Quartet the players combined insouciant charm with fierce urgency in the opening Allegretto and trance-like playing in the Andantino, its long lines seeming to be held in stasis as slow melodies came and went. The more genial moments were given with a light touch, which morphed into emphatic muscularity as the music demanded.

TIM HOMFRAY

NOVUS QUARTET

WIGMORE HALL 14 APRIL 2024

In this Sunday-morning concert the Novus Quartet performed Mozart's E flat major Quartet K428 with great contrasts of delicacy, rich tone and constant dynamic variation. In the steady-paced second movement the musicians found further contrasts: between vibrato-free fragility and full, warm sound, the dynamics in constant flux, and with little hiatuses at the cadences. After the forthright optimism of the Menuetto the Trio occupied a very different, more melancholy landscape. The finale scurried along on a tide of energy and stabbing accents.

The Ravel quartet, for which the violinists swapped places, was full of shifting moods and colours, with a wealth of scintillating details, a mix of precision and expressive rubato. Between the vivid, busy outer sections of the second-movement Assez vif, there was gossamer lightness in the central Lent. The playing in the third movement was exquisite, with exceptional matching of tone and immaculate ensemble. The final few bars unfolded as a profound meditation, from which the finale exploded in a kind of emotional turmoil, with its many subtle shifts of tempo woven into a scintillating musical story.

TIM HOMFRAY

ENGEGÅRD QUARTET

CONWAY HALL 21 APRIL 2024

Mozart's 'Prussian' Quartets are not as frequently programmed as they might (or should) be, and this fine Norwegian ensemble has set down an exemplary modern recording of them (for Lawo). In the event, however, anticipation had to yield to reality in K589, because leader Arvid Engegård seemed out of sorts and not disposed to mesh with his colleagues. Some brittle tone and rigid rhythms persisted in Bartók's Third Quartet, though muscular confidence and collective musicianship won out, with violist Juliet Jopling forming a bridge of contact between the others.

In footballing terms, half-time oranges and a pep-talk must have raised their game, and the Engegård played much more as a team in the second half. Having commissioned *A Tale of Lead and Light* from fellow Norwegian Maja Ratkje in 2011, the quartet persuasively staged her taut drama, based on motifs from Beethoven's 'Rasumovsky' no.1, in which carefree play is overtaken by anxiety and then catastrophe.

The gestural vocabulary of Ratkje's clouded tonal harmony feels familiar from Schoenberg and Ligeti, but the course of events is compelling enough. Likewise, the taut 20-minute span of Fanny Mendelssohn's Quartet in E flat major packs in some vividly Beethovenian ideas, which struggle to define themselves against the backdrop of her brother's quartet writing. A halting pathos to the Romanze, however, strikingly anticipates Felix's

Intensity personified from Quatuor Danel

Joyful musicianship from Maria Włoszczowska and friends

tribute to the memory of his sister in his own F minor Quartet, and the Engegård coloured it with the kind of Mozartian ambivalence of sunshine and showers which would have been welcome in the opening work.

PETER QUANTRILL

MARIA WŁOSZCZOWSKA, TIM CRAWFORD (VIOLINS) TIMOTHY RIDOUT, TING-RU LAI (VIOLAS) TIM POSNER (CELLO)

WIGMORE HALL 23 APRIL 2024

There was a gleeful opening to Mozart's B flat String Quintet K174, with dynamic playing from Maria Włoszczowska and colourful touches of vibrato. It was a joyous performance, made clear by all the smiles from the performers. The violinists sculpted the opening theme of the Adagio with exquisite sensitivity. Following the bucolic good humour of the Menuetto and Trio, with touches of comedic exaggerated phrasing, the players chased their tails with gusto in the scalic dialogues of the finale.

We were then transported into the very different world of Schoenberg's late String Trio, played by all the Tims: violinist Crawford, violist Ridout and cellist Posner. After the manic muscularity of the opening, they skilfully wove together Schoenberg's disjointed fragments, with their catalogue of string effects and extreme technical demands, drawing from the music moments of great delicacy and emotional heat.

Ridout took the soloist's role in the viola quintet version of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet. He was consistently excellent, fluid and robust, with poised beauty at the opening of the Adagio and expressive nuances in the recitative. Posner, meanwhile, gave a beautifully flowing account of the first variation in the finale.

TIM HOMFRAY

VERONA QUARTET

CONWAY HALL 28 APRIL 2024

The Verona Quartet's recordings of Szymanowski, Janáček and Ligeti hardly prepared me for the rich carpet of tone which this Cleveland-based ensemble unfurled for Mendelssohn's op.12 Quartet. The impression of retro-romanticism arose partly from the compact seating, partly the Conway Hall's gorgeous wood-panelled acoustic, but the full vibrato came as quite a surprise – a welcome one – in the 20-year-old Mendelssohn's homage to late Beethoven.

At any rate, no modern orchestra would address Mendelssohn, or Beethoven, with such opulent sonority. Yet any stylistic qualms were swept aside by the quartet's second-half performance of op.132. Rather than Beethoven the alienated visionary, the Verona underlined the work's deep and songful wisdom in a profoundly centred interpretation. Leader Jonathan Ong's place as first among very much equals nevertheless marks out the Verona as a 21st-century ensemble, and the confessional space of the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' evoked not a church or a therapy session but an overdue unburdening to an old friend.

In between came the Fourth Quartet of Grażyna Bacewicz. The surface polish, both of Bacewicz's style and the Verona's ensemble, lent an unexpected Hollywood glamour to her Szymanowski-inherited strain of French lyricism. Her quartet writing shares with Haydn and Bartók a resistance to being defined by this or that mood, but the forms are more elusive, the themes not quite memorable enough to stick. Given performances as rhythmically supple and thoroughly integrated as this one, however, and Bacewicz's Fourth stands every chance of entering the repertoire.

PETER QUANTRILL

PHOTOS WIGMORE HALL TRUST 2024

RECORDINGS

TRAUM UND TRAUMA

ANTHEIL Violin Sonata no.2 **DEBUSSY** Violin Sonata **JANÁČEK** Violin Sonata **SCHULHOFF** Violin Sonata no.1 op.7
Friederike Starkloff (violin)
Endri Nini (piano)

GENUIN GEN24870

An album celebrating a remarkable decade of musical invention

In this recording, violinist Friederike Starkloff and pianist Endri Nini present a mini-survey of shifting musical styles in the first quarter of the 20th century. They open with Erwin Schulhoff's First Violin Sonata, written in 1913 when he was 19. In the first-movement Allegro risoluto quirky, jerky motifs give way to moments of lyricism, its language veering between Romantic and the verge of atonality. In the long lines of the following Tranquillo Starkloff is always lyrical, before bringing lightness and wit to the following Presto. She imbues the sprightly Allegro moderato finale with sparkling energy.

There is a good deal of sensitive, delicate playing in the first movement of the Debussy sonata, outlining its quixotic dramatic narrative. Starkloff includes some fruity portamentos, not all of them marked, and does so again in the following Intermède. In the finale she and Nini revel in Debussy's extensive palette of colours.

She starts Janáček's sonata with a super-heated flourish, presaging the fierce, emotionally wrenching outpourings to come. The Ballada has intimate delicacy, and the central Meno mosso of the Allegretto has a sense of gentle questing before the bleak dialogues of the final Adagio.

In George Antheil's Second Sonata (1923), in which popular music meets the avant-garde, Starkloff is variously seductive, swinging and biting *au talon*, and makes the most of such instructions as 'giggled' and 'a little "off"'. At the end Nini forsakes the piano for a couple of small drums. The recording is warm and clear.

TIM HOMFRAY

OTTO VAN DEN TOOM

PÄRT ÜBER BACH

BACH Cantata 'Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis' BWV21: Sinfonia; 'Double' Concerto in C minor BWV1060R (version for two violins)
PÄRT Tabula Rasa; Collage über B-A-C-H; Silouan's Song
Simone Lamsma (violin) Amsterdam Sinfonietta/Candida Thompson (violin)

CHANNEL CLASSICS CCS46624

A meeting of minds across the centuries in this imaginatively conceived album

This enterprising programme affirms Bach's influence on Pärt's stylistic development. The Amsterdam Sinfonietta offers a dramatic account of Pärt's three-movement *Collage*, a significant turning-point after his self-confessed reverence for Bach and his discomfort with his own musical language. Based on the B-A-C-H motif, the work's heart is its central Sarabande, in which Pärt's 'hateful' music is juxtaposed with phrases from the Sarabande of Bach's Sixth English Suite, lyrically rendered on the oboe. Pärt later drew invaluable sustenance from silence, something that features prominently in the text-based *Silouan's Song* and the haunting 'Silentium' of his *Tabula Rasa*, in which his expressive 'tintinnabuli' idiom is used to striking effect. Simone Lamsma and Candida Thompson immerse themselves in a concentrated account of 'Silentium' and dispatch the technical pyrotechnics of the preceding ('Ludus') variations and cadenza with precision and aplomb.

Both works by Bach are arrangements, Lamsma and Thompson masquerading as interweaving oboist and violin in the cantata movement and performing the concerto in a thoroughly 'modern', largely unembellished manner. They play its Allegros with energy and buoyancy and, over a soothing organ backdrop, bring a seamless cantabile dialogue to the

Thoroughly modern Bach from Lamsma and Thompson

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

Adagio, even if their regular ritardandos at cadences of melodic handover become mannered. The resonant recording seems to transform the Sinfonietta into a much larger ensemble.

ROBIN STOWELL

BARTÓK Portrait no.1 **BEETHOVEN** Romance no.1 **BERG** Violin Concerto **BERLIOZ** Rêverie et Caprice **CORELLI** Sonata in D minor 'La folia' (arr. Léonard); works by **Brahms, Dvořák, Hubay, Schubert, Stravinsky** and **Tchaikovsky**
Joseph Szigeti (violin) unknown (piano) Philharmonia Orchestra/ Constant Lambert; NBC Symphony Orchestra/Dimitri Mitropoulos; WOR Symphony Orchestra/ Alfred Wallenstein; San Francisco Symphony Orchestra/Leonard Bernstein

BIDDULPH 85045-2

The Berg concerto is the standout in a wide-ranging album

This mixed bag revives Joseph Szigeti's legendary 1945 live performance of Berg's Vioin Concerto, in much better sound than a previous Music & Arts release. It is only the fourth recording of this work that we have, after those by its commissioner Louis Krasner with Anton Webern, Fritz Busch and Artur Rodzinski.

Newcomers to Szigeti's art need to be forewarned about his vibrato. He started out employing virtually none, but during the years when he worked on this aspect of his playing, he adopted the rather wide vibrato of his teacher Hubay. After about 1940 his vibrations loosened a little, as can be heard on some of these 1941–6 recordings. I am not bothered by it in the Berg, indeed I find his playing very sympathetic – and he could not have a better collaborator than Mitropoulos. The likes of Krasner, Kogan, Grumiaux and Faust may bring a purer tone to Berg, but Szigeti represents an important stage in the work's performance history.

The 1946 studio records with Constant Lambert of Berlioz's *Rêverie et Caprice* and Bartók's First *Portrait* are classics, beautifully played.

Beethoven's First Romance from 1945 with Bernstein cannot compete with Adolf Busch's commanding 1942 version with Wallenstein, while I found the Corelli-Léonard 'La folia' rather tedious.

Earlier Szigeti records of the short pieces can be found, with more 'together' vibrato. That said, Tchaikovsky's *Valse sentimentale* comes off surprisingly well, and Szigeti can still toss off François Schubert's annoying bee, Brahms's Fifth Hungarian Dance, the Stravinsky-Dushkin 'Danse russe' and Hubay's 'Zephyr', while the Schubert-Friedberg Rondo has nice bounce and the Dvořák–Kreisler G minor *Slavonic Dance* due style.

TULLY POTTER

CHRIS O'DONOVAN

The dream team: Benjamin Grosvenor, Nicola Benedetti and Sheku Kanneh-Mason

BEETHOVEN 'Triple' Concerto; folk song settings
Nicola Benedetti (violin) Sheku Kanneh-Mason (cello) Benjamin Grosvenor (piano) Gerald Finley (bass-baritone) Philharmonia Orchestra/Santtu-Matias Rouvali

DECCA 4854624

A starry line-up of soloists more than lives up to expectation

A collection of celebrities doesn't always add up to more than the sum of their parts, but this starry partnership combines brilliant individualism with cohesive ensemble playing.

The opening solo entries of Beethoven's 'Triple' Concerto, led by cellist Kanneh-Mason, are all sweetness and light, the trio striking an immediate tone of bonhomie while maintaining (as do orchestra and conductor) rhythmic momentum. The nuanced playing, and the brilliant recording – expertly balancing the individual instrumentalists as well as their interaction with orchestra – are a

delight throughout. The interplay between the soloists of upwards-rushing scales just before the exposition repeat is one of many ear-tickling moments.

The second movement is taken at a gratifying Largo, yet its pulse floats with quiet elegance. Kanneh-Mason's opening theme – high up on the top string – is as self-effacing as it is shimmeringly beautiful; and the serenity continues as Benedetti takes it up. There's no lack of swagger in the finale (and a vigorous moto perpetuo section), though not at the exclusion of poetic moments.

Irish, Scottish and Welsh folk-song settings by Beethoven are a thoughtful complement (although Gerald Finley, who sings in fully a third of the disc, is unaccountably absent from the cover). It's all rounded off with a wistfully rhapsodic reading of an arrangement by Fritz Kreisler, with his cellist brother Hugo, of the 'Londonderry Air'.

EDWARD BHESANIA

BRAHMS AND CONTEMPORARIES VOL.1

BRAHMS Piano Quartet no.2 in A major **LE BEAU** Piano Quartet in F minor

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

CHANDOS CHAN20297

Winning advocacy of a Clara Schumann pupil, though she's no match for Brahms

Luise Adolpha Le Beau was born in 1850, moved in circles including Clara Schumann and Joseph Rheinberger, who both taught her, and Hans von Bülow, who supported her. She must also have known Mendelssohn's chamber music, as there are a couple of themes in the outer movements of her F minor Piano Quartet that are dead ringers for passages from the finales of his two piano trios.

This is the first appearance on disc of the quartet: Le Beau's style is confident and assured but with a tendency for development to become a little foursquare. Nevertheless, this is beautifully written for all four instruments. Apart from the chromatically inflected opening of the Adagio, the work doesn't stray too much from its fundamental key centres, so you reach the end of a movement feeling as if you haven't travelled very far, Le Beau's trajectory basically being more melody-driven and linear than, say, Brahms.

Nevertheless, it's eminently worth hearing, and the advocacy of the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective presents it in the best possible light. The Brahms coupling is marginally less successful, with the Kaleidoscope happier in the more reflective music than in more strenuous passages: the extra degree of precision and passion brought to the work by the Leopold Trio and Marc-André Hamelin (Hyperion) brings the work more vividly off the page. That said, the Le Beau is ample recommendation for this enticing project.

DAVID THREASHER

★ **BRIDGE** Oration **FRANCES-HOAD** Earth, Sea, Air **WALTON** Cello Concerto

Laura van der Heijden (cello) BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/ Ryan Wigglesworth

CHANDOS CHSA5346

Superbly intense readings from a young British cellist forging her own path

A ruminative and glowering rhapsody in a continuous half-hour span, *Oration* takes some holding together. The Chandos engineering sensitively places the spotlight firmly on Laura van der Heijden, with Wigglesworth and his orchestra touching in background detail, as a wordless and baleful protest against war.

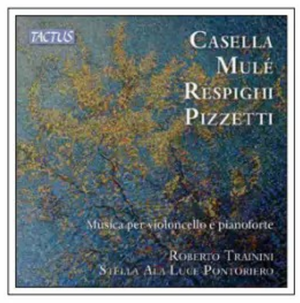
Laura van der Heijden: quiet eloquence

Other soloists have brought more extroversion to the solo part, but the 2012 BBC Young Musician winner captures a quintessentially English quality of sullen and repressed eloquence which will not express itself in long and soaring phrases.

In this sense, the other two concertos present complementary facets of English cello writing. The soloist is a more positive and extrovert actor in Cheryl Frances-Hoad's concerto in all but name. More memorable than the melodic material itself is the steady accumulation of tension through the ingeniously varied episodes of 'Earth', and the soft swell of 'Sea' takes over as though van der Heijden had walked down to the shore. The glinting orchestration of this nocturne brings us to a beach not so far from Britten's Aldeburgh, before 'Air' lifts off on currents of entirely 21st-century harmony.

With the opening bars of Walton's concerto, however, the earlier pieces are eclipsed – or perhaps that's simply the effect of Wigglesworth's deft hand on the tiller and van der Heijden's

MONIKA S. JAKUBOWSKA



ownership of the solo part. In conversational dialogue with the orchestra, she gives a more muted and vulnerable cast to the first movement's slow dissolve than Steven Isserlis, and her scherzo is a perilously skittish affair, lacking the last degree of definition but throwing caution to the winds. The finale is again stretched to extremes of dynamic and rhetorical gesture which we associate more with Shostakovich than Walton, and to electrifying effect.

PETER QUANTRILL

CASELLA Cello Sonata op.8; Notturno and Tarantella **MULÈ** Largo **PIZZETTI** Tre Canti **RESPIGHI** Adagio con Variazioni
Roberto Trainini (cello)
Stella Ala Luce Pontoriero (piano)
TACTUS TC880003

Italian cello rarities prove a mixed affair, despite powerful characterisation

A passion for rediscovering Italian 20th-century music has proved the inspiration for this clearly recorded disc. Roberto Trainini's uncle – a professional cellist – opened the gateway to cello studies, and his strong commitment to this repertoire is powerfully conveyed here, with a vivid use of vibrato and a strong sense of line. It's unfortunate, however, that the material on offer is somewhat variable. Casella, for example, is a rather patchy composer. The opening of his early Cello Sonata offers a bold idea that immediately latches in the mind, and is developed very effectively in the first movement, but the meanderingly chromatic Adagio yields few rewards. A similar theme to the opening movement surfaces in the finale, but quickly gets buried in a cluttered myriad of notes. It's equally difficult to get much out of the quicksand harmonic language that features in the later Nocturne, but the mood lightens in the fiery Tarantella which partners it, delivered by Trainini with great panache.

Respighi's *Adagio con Variazoni* is another disappointment The main thematic material seems lacklustre, though Trainini projects the work's lyrical qualities and string-crossing virtuosity with élan. Far more appealing is the melodic simplicity of the Largo by the operatic composer Mulè. But undoubtedly the highlights of the disc are Pizzetti's *Tre Canti*. Here, the melodic and harmonic material is striking and the textures carefully handled by Trainini and Pontoriero.

JOANNE TALBOT

ERKIN String Quartet **RAVEL** String Quartet **SCHULHOFF** Five Pieces for String Quartet
Klenke Quartet
ACCENTUS ACC30607

An enterprising programme in which a Turkish discovery stands out

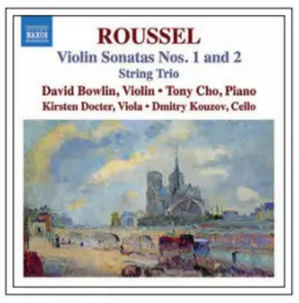
The connecting factor in this imaginative programme is the way its composers exploit folk-inflected material in highly original ways. In this respect, Turkish composer Ulvi Cemal Erkin's Quartet is a gem of a discovery, offering a captivating mix of Anatolian folk-inspired rhythms and melodies, laced with a fine ear for European compositional techniques. The music is catchy and direct, the Klenke giving a highly defined reading that is neat and full of character.

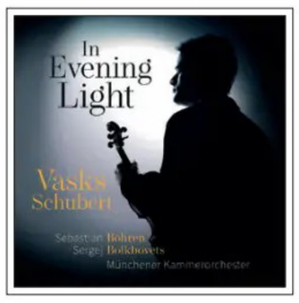
Erwin Schulhoff's *Five Pieces* are brilliant cameo works, each movement reinventing a familiar dance style within a distinctly advanced tonal milieu. The music is sophisticated and direct, but also has some pleasingly acerbic, gritty moments. The Klenke Quartet's performances are highly charged, rhythmically vibrant and meticulously prepared, if not quite managing the range of colours invoked in the Bennewitz Quartet's Supraphon recording, where the blending is more refined and the sound palette more varied.

On the whole, the Klenke's Ravel is very good, with some imaginative interpretative insights. That said, it doesn't reach the level of the benchmark recording by Quatuor Ebène (Erato), which musters a

Panache aplenty from the Klenke Quartet

IRÈNE ZANDEL





greater range of timbres and dynamic gradations, as well as a more subtly refined handling of rubato.

JOANNE TALBOT

ROUSSEL Violin Sonatas: no.1 in D minor, no.2 in A major; String Trio
David Bowlin (violin) Kirsten Docter (viola) Dmitry Kouzov (cello) Tony Cho (piano)
NAXOS 8574577

No loss of character as a master of the stage turns inward

Albert Roussel's First Violin Sonata, dating from 1907–8, reflects the French musical milieu of the time. After its soulful opening David Bowlin leaps into the jaunty, rhythmically vital second theme with energy and glistening tone. He produces a rich, woody sound in the darker-hued development and some passionate G-string outbursts in the coda, before giving a supple account of the twisting, restless lines of the second-movement Assez animé, with expressive playing on the lower strings in the slower central section. The dancing final Très animé is upbeat, full of syncopation, punchy accents and crisp staccatos. Throughout the sonata, with its technical demands and touches of theatre, both Bowlin and Tony Cho rise splendidly to its challenges.

The A major Second Sonata of 1924 opens with an Allegro con moto full of changes of character, be they contemplative, aggressive or delicate. In the central Andante a simple melody over a rocking piano figure moves swiftly into double-stopped vehemence and a torrent of demisemiquavers played with flair and dynamism. The Presto finale is an impish romp of rhythmic wrong-footing and eccentric double-stopped dance, all performed with wit and energy.

Sebastian Bohren: power and beauty in Vasks

Written in 1937, the String Trio is Roussel's last completed work. Its central Adagio is a profound meditation, played with sustained intensity, with an exuberant gigue to follow. The recording is clear and well balanced.

TIM HOMFRAY

IN EVENING LIGHT
SCHUBERT Rondeau brillant in B minor D895 (arr. Suits) **VASKS** Violin Concerto no.2 'In Evening Light'; Lonely Angel
Sebastian Bohren (violin) Munich Chamber Orchestra/ Sergej Bolkhovets
AVIE AV2662

Masterly musicianship aplenty in a Vasks premiere

Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks experienced a musical epiphany in the 1970s. Inspired by nature and a need for emotional honesty he turned to a new style of simplicity that has led him to be grouped among the 'holy Minimalists' alongside Arvo Pärt, John Tavener and Henryk Górecki. And, in common with the rest of the group, he has no shortage of champions.

Vasks's First Violin Concerto 'Distant Light' was premiered by Gidon Kremer in 1997 and the composer returned to the subject of light for his Second Violin Concerto, its name a reference to our twilight years; like the first, this is also scored for strings alone.

In this, its premiere recording, Swiss violinist Sebastian Bohren proves to be an ideal champion. The long soaring lines are lovingly sustained and his tone, although lucid, allows for melancholy and uncertainty too. Yet there's no lack of power, not least in the three cadenzas, which are replete with double- and triple-stops. The Munich Chamber Orchestra offers warm and sensitive support, while also being alive to the dramatic tension of the second movement. *Lonely Angel* is adapted from the fifth movement of Vasks's String Quartet no.4 (1999) and here Bohren shines in the extreme high-lying writing. Schubert's *Rondeau brillant* is an unlikely pairing but its songlike and dancelike features are neatly contrasted in this arrangement for violin and strings.

EDWARD BHESANIA

FLORIAN GANSLMEIER

SHOSTAKOVICH String Quartets vol.2: no.10 in A flat major, no.11 in F minor, no.12 in D flat major

Quartetto Noûs

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 96420

An Italian group brings warmth to its ongoing Shostakovich cycle

There is still room, even in the well-filled Shostakovich discography, for a down-to-earth approach to the later quartets. The Tenth dates from 1964 and, like the 'Babi Yar' 13th Symphony from two years earlier, has not yet succumbed to the skeletal textures and deathly pallor of the composer's long goodbye in music.

All of which is to commend the Noûs for projecting the Tenth with such rude health and good humour. The sul ponticello ghostliness of the opening Andante is charged with wistful rather than bitter nostalgia. The full measure of the bow lays into the string throughout the furious scherzo, and the finale is imbued with a warm cantabile.

The Eleventh is a tougher nut to crack. Here again, though, a sound-palette more usually applied to Tchaikovsky pays dividends in bringing rich and personable characterisation to what can look and sound like desiccated little motifs. The strutting soldier of the second movement, the procession of monks accompanied by a drunkard in the fourth, the graveside scene of the sixth: all leap from the page like episodes from *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Where this essentially Romantic approach falls short is in the Twelfth. Something more deadpan is surely needed for the cello's opening tone-row. The approach of the Noûs is to join the dots even when the shape of the completed image is far from clear. The first movement rather loses its way, despite a taut basic pulse, and, after a ferociously committed opening, the tension leaches out of the second, despite the technical finish of both playing and engineering. But overall it's a cycle well worth following.

PETER QUANTRILL

SWAIN Summer Rhapsody; English Reel; Song at Evening; Cello Sonata; Piano Quartet

Lorraine McAslan (violin)
Sarah-Jane Bradley (viola)
Tim Lowe (cello)
Timon Altwegg (piano)

DUTTON CDLX7412

A neglected voice emerges from the shadows thanks to powerful advocacy

Being familiar with two melodious viola morsels by Freda Swain (1902–84), I jumped at the chance of getting acquainted with more of her music. Those pieces were written in 1958 for educational purposes and are accordingly modest in scope; not that there is anything condescending about Sarah-Jane Bradley's lovingly phrased *Song at Evening* or the witty, crisp spiccato she employs in *English Reel*.

Composed in 1936 and premiered by William Primrose, *Summer Rhapsody* is the prelude to a large vocal-instrumental work inspired by Shakespeare. Again strongly supported by Timon Altwegg, Bradley perfectly catches its wistful, improvisatory atmosphere. The beginning – shades of Vaughan Williams's *Lark* – shows off the full-bodied sound of her 1896 G.A. Chanot viola across its full range.

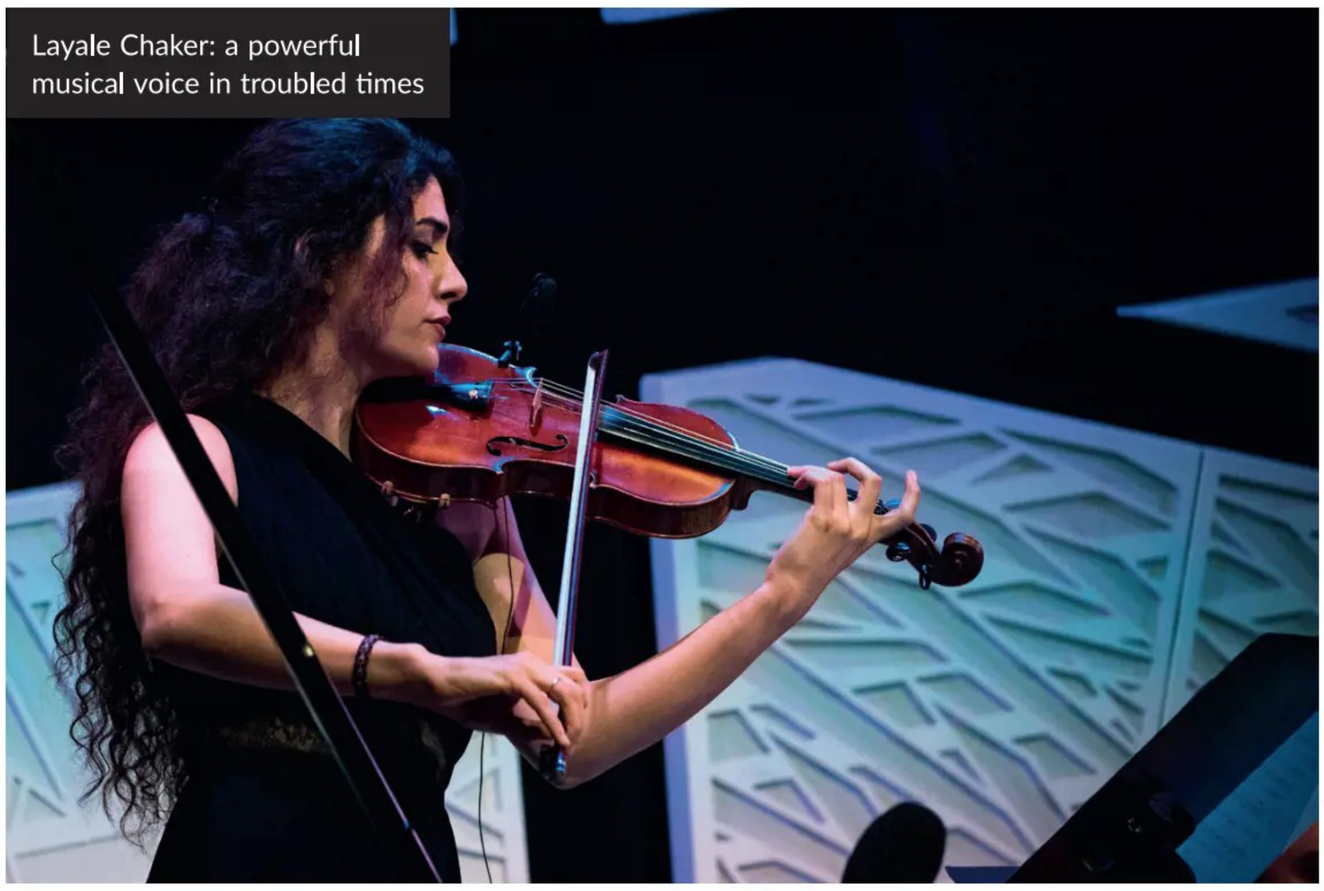
Swain became unsatisfied with her 1923 Cello Sonata – one of her earliest pieces in a larger format – and removed it from the catalogue of her works, but Altwegg and Tim Lowe make a strong case for it, managing to minimise its undeniable prolixity by the sheer passion of their playing. The Piano Quartet is also conceived on a large scale. Composed in 1950, it finds Swain at the peak of her powers, employing modally tinged harmonies that have occasional brushes with atonality.

In this powerful performance, it makes for a rousing end to a beautifully recorded CD that is further enhanced by illuminating notes from Altwegg, who takes care of the Swain estate and is hopefully already busy selecting music for a sequel.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

Warm lyricism from Quartetto Noûs

HANS LIVIABELLA



Layale Chaker: a powerful musical voice in troubled times

RADIO AFLOAT

Layale Chaker (violin, voice) Sarafand

IN A CIRCLE RECORDS ICR031

A musician of the world addresses contemporary politics

Releasing two CDs on the same day – one classical, the other jazz (both deeply contested terms, obviously, surely seldom more so than with this pair of albums) – seems like a statement of intent, even a challenge. And it's to Lebanese-born, Brooklyn-based violinist, composer and vocalist Layale Chaker's enormous credit that she achieves such a rich, distinctive musical language in both – one that cherry picks from cool contemporary classical, simmering jazz, ear-tweaking Arabic microtonality and gently probing improvisation – and also makes the two releases so utterly different from each other.

For the title of her second jazz album with the quintet Sarafand, Chaker uses the potent image of a radio lost at sea, transmitting the voices and hopes of people from many continents, while deeply connected with the natural world. Similarly, there are collisions between apparently disconnected voices here – Chaker's own decidedly Arabic violin inflections in 'Khab Nisan' jar with soft-jazz harmonies from Phillip Golub's piano and later an arresting interlude from his microtonal keyboard, though cellist Jake Charkey brings the track back to land with a heartfelt, earthy solo. Charkey is a richly expressive presence throughout, matching Chaker's subtly expressive ornamentation in 'Fall of Rome', while contributing a portamento-thick melodic line to percussionist John Hadfield's slinky, stuttering rhythms in 'Sketch – Unraveled'.

Whether as a breathy vocalist or nimble violinist, Chaker makes her presence keenly felt amid the disc's gloriously far-reaching range of styles, and its almost bewildering collection of moods, textures, ideas and perspectives. Her music is unfailingly fluent and elegant, even when it's at its most complex.

DAVID KETTLE

VIGIL

Layale Chaker (violin) Ethel

IN A CIRCLE RECORDS ICR030

Passion aplenty in an album powered by conviction

If *Radio Afloat* (reviewed above) showcases her pioneering jazz credentials, *Vigil* presents violinist and composer Layale Chaker's classical creativity – and she's an ever more prominent artist in these fields, having played with ensembles including the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, not to mention the recent premiere of her opera *Ruinous Gods* in Spoleto. *Vigil*, however, is very much a collaboration with New York-based new music quartet Ethel. Not only does Chaker join the Ethel foursome to create a new quintet, but each member of the quartet also contributes a piece to the disc (while Chaker offers two).

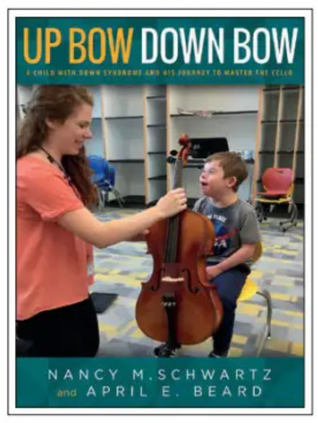
The large-scale, five-movement work by Chaker that gives the disc its title also sums up the release's overarching theme: of righteous anger in the face of climate chaos, forced movement of people, bigotry and violence. Chaker nonetheless manages to combine fury with lyricism, from the nightmare imagery and wailing sirens of the second movement to her almost sobbing solo in the fourth. Ethel manages a miraculous blend of vivid sonic storytelling with precision and passion, playing with a sense of deep conviction that makes Chaker's music all the more powerful.

The Ethel players' own pieces are very varied, from the pseudo-folk fiddling of violinist Kip Jones's strongly projected *Teen Mania* to the unsettling, Crumb-like soundscapes of cellist Dorothy Lawson's *The Demon Within*. After the slinky sophistication of Chaker's arrangement of Sayyid Darwish's *Salla Fina Llahdu*, the propulsive Balkan-style rhythms of Ethel violinist Corin Lee's *Sketka* bring the disc to a raw and pungent close.

DAVID KETTLE

LITTLE OLIVE

BOOKS



Up Bow, Down Bow: A Child with Down Syndrome and His Journey to Master the Cello
Nancy M. Schwartz, April E. Beard

132PP ISBN 9781615997046

MODERN HISTORY PRESS £32.99

Up Bow, Down Bow tells the story of Alex, a boy with Down's syndrome, and his quest to learn how to play the cello. Over the course of the book we are introduced to the teaching approaches of Alex's mother Nancy, and April, the music educator at his school. As they spend time with Alex they are confronted with obstacles that push them to 'relearn' how they teach and assist the boy. It is a story about resilience, the power of love – how the player and instrument are friends – and perpetual open-mindedness. Most of all it is about the rewards of focusing on what someone can do, and not on what they can't. The authors are not afraid to go against tradition if it's best for their students and for them as teachers.

The two authors take turns in writing the chapters – which appear to be independent of each other, meaning that what Nancy writes in one chapter may not be related to what April writes in the next, or indeed the last. The two women tell their stories individually but I found that the way the narratives are intertwined adds a lot of freshness to the experience. That freshness, together with the overall cheerleading tone of the book, put the reader in a truly happy mood.

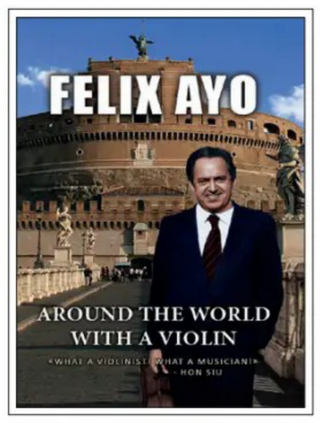
The book is full of good teaching advice and life lessons that can apply not only when teaching people with Down's syndrome but to anyone in general, and that can only inspire better teaching and happier learning. Reading through the pages stimulates one's reflections on teaching 'off the beaten track', as well as breaking certain inviolable codes in classical music tuition which – one will realise – might be worth breaking.

The book is illustrated with lots of photos of Alex, his activities and the people around him. It is also accompanied by an extensive bibliography and many video links to listen to the young cellist's progress. This gives us the impression of being deeply immersed in Alex's life.

JACQUELINE VANASSE

SCHWARTZ & BEARD

Alex (*centre*) practising with April Beard and Nancy Schwartz



Around the World with a Violin
Felix Ayo

204PP ISBN 9798871974346

STRANGEDAYS BOOKS $15

Before his death in September 2023, the Spanish-born Italian violinist Felix Ayo finished writing his memoirs. He is best remembered for his 1955 recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with the chamber ensemble I Musici, of which he was a founder member. From the beginning, he tells us, 'Vivaldi was our spearhead. We were thinking about the recovery of Vivaldi, especially from an interpretive point of view. We wanted a cleaner, clearer, more crystalline Vivaldi, full of vitality in the allegri and with intense yet restrained expressiveness in the slow tempos. We played Vivaldi for our debut at Santa Cecilia and he remained an important presence in our repertoire.'

I Musici was founded while Ayo was studying at the Conservatorio di Musica Santa Cecilia: 'I was present for 17 years right from the first rehearsal.' A year later he also founded a piano quartet, which in 1970 would become the Quartetto Beethoven di Roma and tour the

world for 36 years. Although he became synonymous with the *Four Seasons* for a whole generation of music lovers through his association with the piece, he had no particular background in Baroque style, let alone historically informed performance (HIP). But he projected, as Shirley Fleming once wrote, 'that wonderful simplicity which is the key to music of this kind. His passagework is absolutely clean and pure. His melodic lines are natural as breathing, and he never for a moment loses the essential pulse of each movement.' His writing style in this book is similarly clear.

Ayo's detailed record of the extensive touring he did with I Musici, the Quartetto and later the Virtuosi di Roma – 750 concerts during the 80s alone – is a bittersweet reminder of times past when the US was constantly being criss-crossed by classical music tours for which players like those of I Musici received $25 a day plus expenses, were scheduled 13 nights in a row with the 14th off, and travelled everywhere by bus.

In addition to the concerts and colleagues, tourism, family and friends, repertoire, press notices and food, Ayo writes about teaching issues, including the importance of a good teacher, shoulder rests, how to attain 'a magnificent basic intonation' and the right way to hold the bow. He recommends studying the repertoire chronologically in order 'to understand the gradual and fascinating development of instrumental technique and composition through the years'. The numerous grainy black and white photographs show up better in the paperback. The book is divided into ten convenient chapters, although with no index, which gives a distinct advantage to the Amazon Kindle version with its invaluable search function.

LAURENCE VITTES

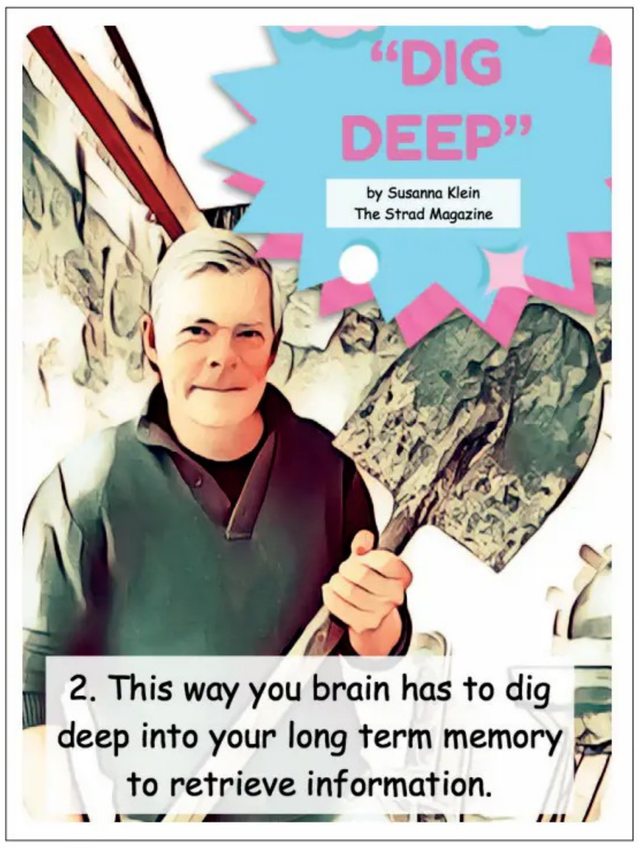
The Amazing Violin Comics: Tips for practicing and mental images for learning stringed instruments
Lauri Hämäläinen

128PP ISBN 9798367038651

SUOMI MUSIC VIOLIN FRIENDS OY €42.90

Lauri Hämäläinen, author of the Violin Friends series for beginners, has put together a novel approach to learning a stringed instrument. Taking the form of a comic book, *The Amazing Violin* has many merits in principle: it may be a better way to reach visual learners, as opposed to notebooks full of handwritten teacher's notes, and it promotes a healthy, holistic approach to learning the instrument. Each page contains an exercise, mostly by Hämäläinen himself but also featuring some from musicians such as Itzhak Perlman and Yehudi Menuhin, broken down into easy steps with visual guides. An index is provided to navigate the contents, which vary from stretching and bow hold exercises to bite-sized music history and how to open the violin case.

As much as I admire the ethos of this book, however, it is in undeniable need of revision. More than the occasional typo, the problem is that it's visually overwhelming. Rather than choosing drawings or true photographs, Hämäläinen has opted for heavily edited photos with an uncanny-valley effect. Sometimes cartoonish and at other times utterly washed out, the art is inconsistent across the book. Most of the images also have



An example of the cartoon panels present in *The Amazing Violin Comics*

distracting backgrounds from wherever Hämäläinen happened to be standing, making the subject hard to distinguish in the haze of the sepia filter, and competing with the brightly coloured stickers on almost every panel.

The layout can be confusing at times, sometimes requiring reading from left to right, then right to left within the same page. What is also lacking is an explanation of *why* each exercise is important and when it should be done. If this could have been added on a plainer page, it might give the reader's eyes a much-needed break. Comic Sans may be a dyslexia-friendly font but, with overwhelming visuals on every page, this is not an easy read.

I could see this book becoming a great asset to a music teacher's toolbox, as a way of sending the student home with a visual guide to recreate an exercise covered in the lesson. As it stands, however, the presentation distracts from what is genuinely good content.

LAUREN WESLEY-SMITH

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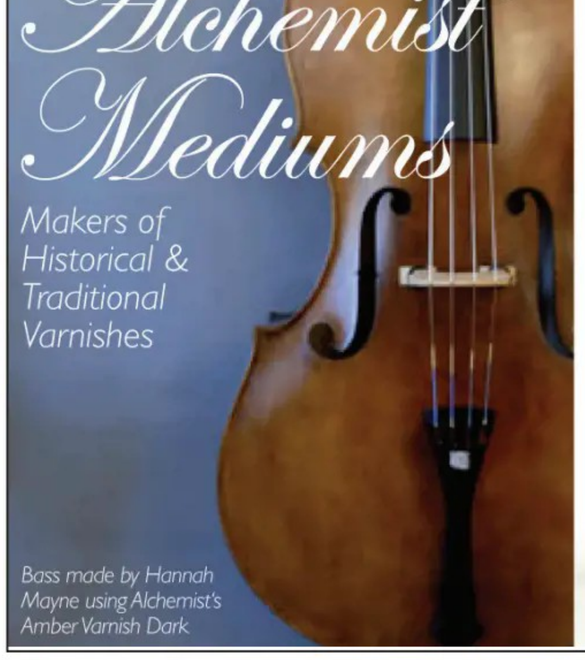

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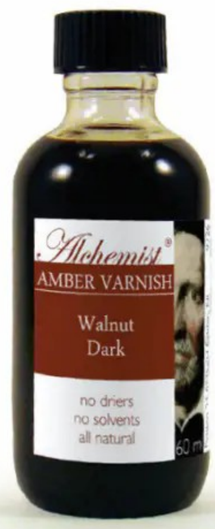

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From the ARCHIVE

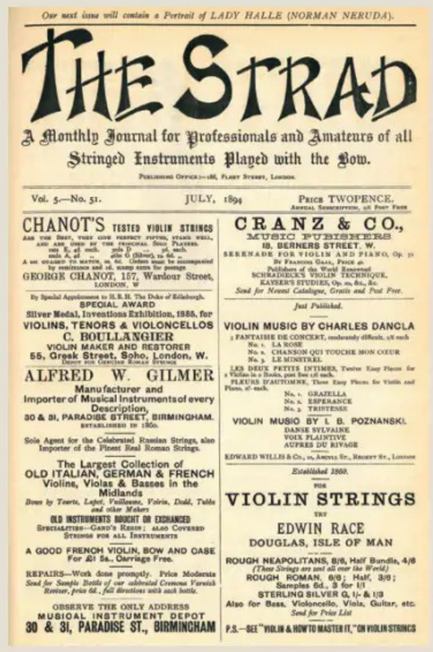
FROM THE STRAD — JULY 1894 — VOL.5 NO.51

In 'Fiddlers on Canvas', *The Strad* surveys paintings at the London art exhibitions of interest to string players. The young lady 'lost in reverie' (*below*) grows up to be Agatha Christie

We wonder to what extent violinists in general are disposed to patronise the sister art of painting. Perhaps not as much as they should do, though this is only surmise on our part. The elevating and inspiring effect of the grandest works of art should appeal very forcibly to students of our most poetic and inspired instrument. But, apart from this view of the influence one art may exercise over the followers of another, violinists will find much to interest them specially in the year's exhibition of the Royal Academy. And, though art criticism is not supposed to be within the province of a fiddler's paper, we think there may be many of our readers who will like to have some particulars thereof.

A four-year-old Agatha Miller (later Christie) in *Lost in Reverie*

The first to attract the fiddler's eye will be No. 45, "Under a Spell" by Percy M. Teasdale. An old country man playing on a fiddle to his grandson, who sits in rapt amazement at the doubtless beautiful strains issuing from the typical farm house instrument played on by the elder. The colouring is good and the play of firelight on the child's face adds not a little to the poetry of the picture.

No. 227, "Rehearsing the 'Miserere': Spain," by J. B. Burgess, R.A., a group of peasant lads and two priests, one of the latter is playing the violin. His attitude is perfect, positions of the hands being all that the greatest stickler for technique could desire. This is rarely found in paintings. The faces of the choristers are beautifully rendered, as, in fact, are those of the priests, particularly the one in the foreground, whose listening expression is suggestive of the re-awakening of long buried memories. No. 372, "Lost in Reverie" by J. Douglas Connah. An endlessly slender young lady violinist in an endless salmon-coloured dress and with an endless expression of melancholy on her face. The music is not in evidence so we cannot say whose "Reverie" she has got lost in; perhaps Vieuxtemps', she may be thinking of the octaves. She has the appearance of having sunk in her chair wearied by long struggling with an obstinate peg. We would suggest as an alternative title, "Shall I never get it in tune?"

Our next issue will contain a Portrait of LADY HALLE (NORMAN NERUDA).

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Rachel Podger
The Baroque violinist talks about her new role as principal guest conductor of Tafelmusik, as well as her teaching and recording

Cremonese bow
We examine an 18th-century bow stick that might possibly have been made in the workshop of Antonio Stradivari

Christopher Bunting
A pupil of Casals, the celebrated British cellist and pedagogue would have marked his 100th birthday this month

Double bass focus
A look at the next generation of talented players, exploring the diversity of talents needed for success

Positioning the f-holes
A process inspired by the methods of the Cremonese masters

PLUS

Session Report
Violinist Lynda O'Connor on her new album *The Irish Four Seasons*

Postcard from Norway
A report from the Bergen International Festival

Sentimental *Work*

ADRIAN CHANDLER

Vivaldi's op.8 set of violin concertos – including the *Four Seasons* – was an early inspiration for the British Baroque violinist and founder of the orchestra La Serenissima

I was ten years old when I heard the whole of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* for the first time. I'd started learning the violin two years earlier, and I'd already had a go at playing the composer's A minor Concerto op.3 no.6 and liked it. So at Christmastime I noticed BBC Radio 3 was airing a concert by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields which included the *Four Seasons*, with Iona Brown as soloist. She was such a great player and I immediately thought that these were a jaw-dropping set of pieces. It was only later that I discovered they were part of a much larger set of twelve concertos, *The Contest between Harmony and Invention*, which stimulated my curiosity even more.

The first of the op.8 concertos I tried to play myself was no.7 – probably the oldest concerto in the set, and one of the only ones I could borrow from Liverpool Central Library. It was a few years later, when I'd moved to Colchester, that I started working on them seriously with my teacher. The first one was 'Autumn', possibly the trickiest one of the lot, and I certainly had to improve my technique in order to play it. The first movement takes exceptional coordination, while the finale contains sextuplets that most people play slurred – even though there are no slurs in the manuscript. You can bodge it to a degree but you do need to hear all the notes.

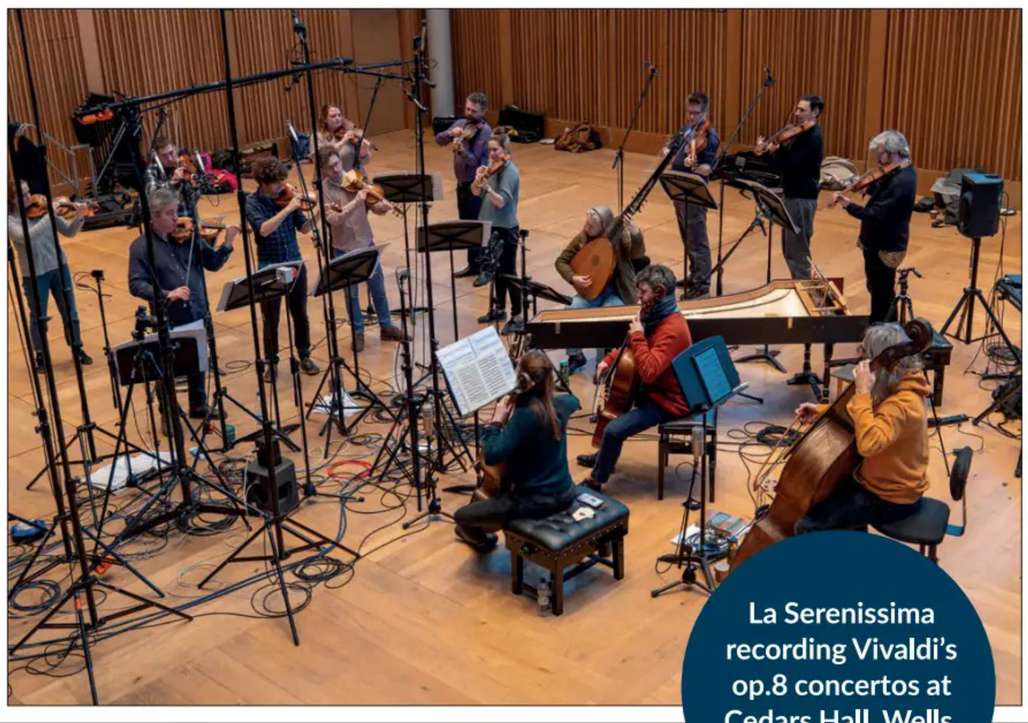
I started playing the Baroque violin when I was 16. For a short time there was an Essex Youth Baroque Orchestra run by Peter Holman, who founded the Parley of Instruments. Although the players all used modern instruments, he coached the strings in a Baroque way, which piqued my interest. So when I started at the Royal College of Music I was already quite well versed in Baroque performance, although my tutor Rodney Friend once called the Baroque timpani's timbre 'like a biscuit tin being kicked round a football pitch'! He had some brilliant ideas all the same; the last movement of 'Autumn' has a passage that I could never make clean, and he came up with an unconventional fingering starting on an up bow that no one else could have thought of. Baroque treatises usually advise starting on a down bow – but then again, Tartini said you should be able to play anything 'back to front'.

Rodney's advice was always: if you have a problem with something, first of all work out exactly what it is and why it's there. Then you'll already be 90 per cent of the way to solving it. I think that's the best advice for playing difficult passages in works by Vivaldi or any other composer.

Vivaldi was obviously a bit of a nutter. The sheer energy it takes to play the op.8 concertos tells you that he was an incredibly virtuosic player himself, and it all comes out in the score. The fast movements are relentlessly energetic, while the slow movements are unbelievably beautiful and soulful; real tear-jerkers where the composer wears his heart on his sleeve. That said, every solo part sits well on the instrument, such that you can tell it must have been written by a violinist. There are many pieces written by non-violinists that are tricky because they're aren't written idiomatically. With Vivaldi, it's just because it's really hard! No.5, 'La Tempesta di Mare', for example, has absolutely brilliant passagework, but I'd recommend all violinists play the concertos for the sheer exuberance of it.

Next year will be the 300th anniversary of the publication of op.8, and also the 30th of our ensemble, La Serenissima. So we're going to be recording a set of the concertos as two separate releases. The first is recorded and we'll put the rest together in the autumn. ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD



La Serenissima recording Vivaldi's op.8 concertos at Cedars Hall, Wells, in February 2024

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